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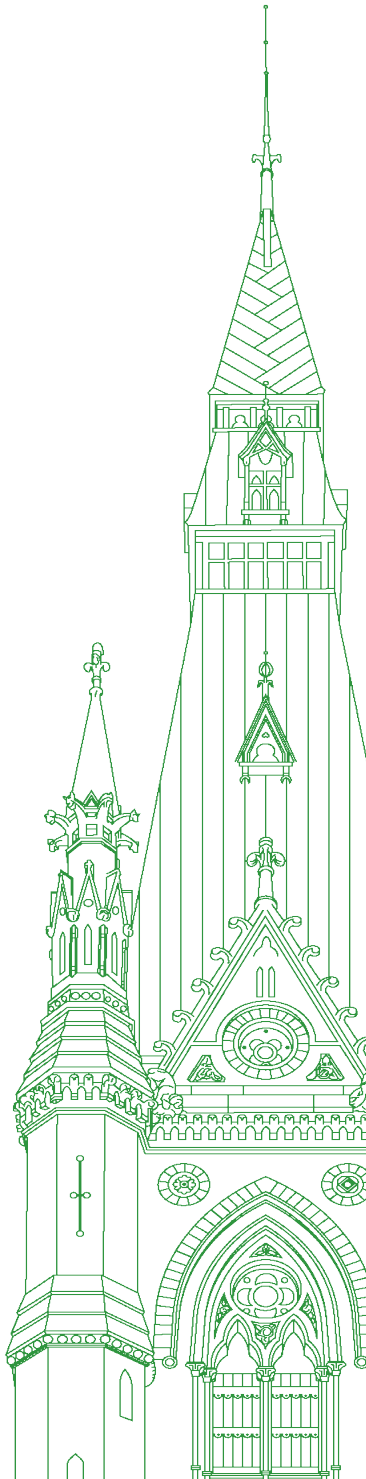
House of Commons Debates

Official Report

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Thursday, October 29, 2026



Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 29, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay before the House, pursuant to subsection 7(3) of the Auditor General Act, the 2026 reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), these documents are deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

LIAISON

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Liaison Committee, entitled "Committee Activities and Expenditures April 1-August 31, 2026".

* * *

PETITIONS

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this petition is timely in that people from Disability Without Poverty are here on Parliament Hill.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to stop the duplication of making people prove they are living with a disability after they have already been deemed living with a disability in their province or territory. They want the Government of Canada to accept provincial and territorial disability determinations as sufficient evidence of eligibility for the disability tax credit when equivalent eligibility criteria have not been met; amend the Income Tax Act and related regulations to eliminate unnecessary duplicative medical certification requirements for the disability tax credit; ensure that eligible Canadians can access the disability tax credit and the Canada disability benefit without unnecessary barriers or delays; and work with the provinces, the territories, disability organizations and health care professionals to create a streamlined disability eligibility process that reduces red tape, improves access to supports and allows family physicians to spend more time caring for patients rather than completing duplicative government paperwork.

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

Gaétan Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition signed by the people of Moonbeam, Ontario.

[*Translation*]

Communities across northern Ontario are calling on this government to recognize Trans-Canada Highway 11 as a project of national interest. Every day of inaction is another day where lives are at risk on this highway, which was closed again just last week.

[*English*]

Moonbeam will certainly not be the last community to sign this petition. We are going door to door and village to village, and the message is the same everywhere. Northern Ontario is asking for action.

[*Translation*]

Designate Trans-Canada Highway 11 as a project of national interest.

* * *

[*English*]

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.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Speaker's Ruling

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF BILL C-40—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 6, 2026, by the House leader of the official opposition concerning the alleged premature disclosure of Bill C-40, an act respecting production, procurement and investment in relation to national defence and national security.

During his intervention, the House leader of the official opposition argued that specific details of Bill C-40 had been shared with journalists before the bill was introduced in the House. He based his assertion on two news articles published before the bill was introduced in the House, which, in his opinion, provided substantive information that could not have been gleaned from the title of the bill, nor deduced from previous government consultations and announcements. The member noted that these articles cited anonymous sources who were not authorized to discuss this information publicly. He posited that such a disclosure constituted a contempt of the House.

● (1005)

[*Translation*]

For his part, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House asserted that there is no prima facie question of privilege. He assured the House that, following its own investigation, the government found no evidence that anyone leaked the contents of the bill while it was on notice. The parliamentary secretary also argued that the legislative details discussed in the news articles in question have been in the public domain as matters of government policy for some time, speaking specifically to deliberations and consultations undertaken by the government on defence procurement and other topics related to the bill. He assured the House that these conversations did not occur at a time even close to the notice of the bill. Finally, he suggested that the information cited in the news articles was at times speculative and uncertain, casting further doubt on the possibility that specific provisions of the bill were divulged.

[*English*]

During a second intervention, the House leader of the official opposition sought to rebut some of the parliamentary secretary's arguments. He questioned the scope and thoroughness of the government's investigation before it concluded that no internal leak had occurred. He also argued that the policy information the government claimed was already in the public domain could not account for everything revealed in the news articles.

Members are right to affirm that it is a long-standing expectation that the House must be the first to be informed of the details of specific legislative measures that will come before it. As explained by Speaker Milliken in his ruling of March 19, 2001, on page 1840 of the Debates:

> The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent [role] which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair has on many occasions been asked to rule on matters regarding the right of the House to have first access to legislative measures, including recently in the current session. One factor to consider is whether the allegation has been met with any admission or denial of responsibility, or alternative explanations. In the case before us, the Chair is faced with two different assertions, one claiming that the rights of the House were violated, and another, from the government, denying that details of one of its bills were prematurely divulged. In other words, the facts are disputed. This is reminiscent of other situations where, taking members at their word, the Chair was reluctant to intervene.

However, it is important to note that the government's responsibility is not the only element that must be considered by the Chair. Speaker Rota stated on March 9, 2021, at page 4762 of the Debates:

> While there is indeed a well-established practice that a member must be taken at their word, the fact remains that the government's stating that it is not responsible for the premature disclosure of a bill is not in itself sufficient to convince the Chair. I would add that the source of information is one factor among others and that it is important first and foremost to determine whether precise details were provided before the House was made aware of them. The Chair must thus take into consideration all the information before it and reach a conclusion based on the facts presented by the members.

[*English*]

With this in mind, I felt it appropriate to review the news articles in question and the text of Bill C-40 now before the House. Having done so, I find that the similarities between the text of the bill and the details in the news articles remain at a high level and do not provide sufficient grounds to conclude that a leak of the bill itself has occurred. Further to this point, while members may be correct in stating that the details published in the news articles go beyond what is revealed in the bill's long title, this cannot stand as a reliable test for judging whether the precise contents of a bill have been divulged.

The Chair also notes that the news articles do not directly address the question of whether the sources cited had access to a copy of the bill itself, or to its specific provisions, and were therefore even in a position to share it, nor has any convincing evidence been brought to the Chair's attention that would demonstrate that the sharing of information between the sources and journalists, or between the government and the sources, took place in the window between when the bill was placed on notice and when the bill was introduced.

[*Translation*]

During his intervention, the parliamentary secretary stated that related public consultations were taking place well before Bill C-40 was placed on notice. As Speaker Regan affirmed in his ruling of June 8, 2017, at page 12320 of the Debates:

> The right of the House to first access to legislation is one of our oldest conventions. It does and must, however, coexist with the need of governments to consult widely, with the public and stakeholders alike, on issues and policies in the preparation of legislation.

[*English*]

After reviewing all the evidence provided, the Chair cannot determine with any degree of certainty that the entirety of the bill, or specific sections thereof, were divulged prior to its introduction in the House. The government's assurance that it has no knowledge of a leak, the substance of the details published in the news articles and the lack of clarity around the nature and timing of the anonymous sources' information all contribute to this conclusion. Accordingly, the Chair does not find that this case constitutes a prima facie question of privilege.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1010)

[*English*]

SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

The House resumed from October 28 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.

Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and to the Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to stand to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

In my capacity as the very proud member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, this issue is extremely important and personal to me as a parent. I have a 14-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter, so I am in the thick and thin of social media and smart devices like cellphones and iPads, making sure that I am continuously engaged with my children when it comes to issues around the safe use of social media. Probably one of the biggest issues that I hear from my constituents on a regular basis, especially those who are parents or grandparents, is how to ensure that we have safe access to social media. I am sure members will agree with me that AI comes up in pretty much every single conversation nowadays. People want to ensure that there are strong regulations to monitor all these things.

As a result of the many conversations I had with my constituents over several months, and I am sure all of us know of the barbecues and different events that take place, I took the liberty of sending a mailer to my constituents, a questionnaire specifically on Bill C-34, the safe social media act, asking them some really important questions so they could help guide me, and hopefully all of us, on how best to navigate this important issue and on the important features that my constituents would like to see in the legislation.

What I asked in this questionnaire, which I sent to all the residents in my riding of Ottawa Centre, were questions like, “How should the government prioritize keeping young Canadians safe online?” and “As the government implements the legislation, what should it prioritize and how?” I also asked my constituents the question, “Which online harms concern you most for the young people in your lives?” We also asked for their experience in online safety and, more specifically, questions concerning the proposed

age restriction for social media accounts, which is suggested in the legislation to be 16 plus.

First of all, I want to thank all my constituents for so enthusiastically writing on this issue. Not only did they send the mailer back after filling out the questions, but they went online, because we had a Google Forms questionnaire available, and participated. They have approached me on the streets and at community events to talk about this as well.

I think a few things really came out of that. There is, as I mentioned earlier, a strong concern as to the safe use of social media. People really want government to step forward and bring in regulations, controls and monitoring so that social media is safe, especially for children, but for seniors as well. I got a very strong sense that there is support for legislation like Bill C-34 from my constituents of Ottawa Centre. One of the key reasons is that people want to protect our children and want legislation. They want Parliament and the government to take steps in that regard.

There is also support for a restriction on the use of social media until age 16. I got a very good sense, from the survey results we got back and from my conversations, that people want to make sure there is some sort of age limitation on who can use social media, and 16 seems to be the right age. I will say that if we talk to young people, there is push-back on that, including from my 14-year-old, who understands the benefits and harms around social media but has probed me as to why the age is 16. I think the most important issue that has come up in my conversations is how we are going to regulate that.

● (1015)

It is one thing to say we will restrict the use of or access to social media to 16-year-olds. The question then becomes how we are going to enforce that rule. There is an understanding that young people being young people, they will find ways to get around it. Of course, everybody is looking at places such as Australia in that regard. I think an important element that, as legislators, we should be focused on throughout this legislation is how best to enforce the rule, because people want a rule like that in place but also want to ensure that it is not just a rule on paper. They want effective implementation and enforcement of the rule as well.

That is why I personally like the idea that we would not just be putting a blanket ban, so to speak, in the legislation. There would be a provision that, if certain standards are met to ensure that there is safe social media, those platforms may be allowed to operate. I think there is a better path, compared to the one in jurisdictions such as Australia, embedded in this legislation, which would allow for access to social media as long as certain standards are met that would ensure that the information our kids have access to is safe.

The second point I want to raise, which is something I said at the outset, is that there is a huge concern around AI and its content, the nature of information that is available. Misinformation and disinformation continue to come up in the conversation, and we saw that in the survey documents we received. There is a very significant concern about misleading information that is AI-manipulated and about content that has been altered through AI.

I think it would be an understatement if I said that deepfake images and videos are a serious concern that people are grappling with. I heard about this through the consultation process I did in my community. People want assurances that we are taking the necessary steps to make sure that deepfake images and videos are regulated, are monitored and are not allowed, because there are some serious concerns.

There are serious concerns from seniors in this regard. I know that much of the focus of the bill is toward young people and teenagers, but there are some serious concerns in our communities on the part of seniors as well who are being exposed to information that looks awfully close to being real. They are concerned about whether information is accurate or not and whether they have been taken advantage of. There are scams being developed. We know that our seniors are quite vulnerable to those kind of scams, frauds, phishing expeditions, etc. There is a real concern from the elderly constituents in my riding of Ottawa Centre on this issue.

I think the legislation has a lot of important elements. I am supportive of the legislation and would ask my colleagues of the House to support it as well. I think it would address a very important issue. We know that social media has become ubiquitous in our lives. It is omnipresent. We all rely on it, but there is no control over the content and the algorithm, and it is having a serious impact on our children. I continue to meet a number of parents, including representatives of organizations now led by parents, who are advocating that kids should not have access to all those things. This is a valid concern. As a parent, I am concerned about it. I am really happy that, as parliamentarians, we are addressing this important issue.

I want to thank all my constituents in Ottawa Centre for taking the time to fill out the survey we circulated and for giving me this important information so I can be a strong champion for their point of view. We need to make sure the legislation not only passes but would actually be stronger and would protect our children.

● (1020)

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague outlined the concerns of his constituents. I imagine that most of them would be happy about the idea of having legislation that would protect their children online. I think the vast majority of Canadians, of course, want that.

The question with the legislation, however, is, who would kids be protected from? Which platforms would be scoped in? Would Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat be scoped in? The legislation does not actually state that. It says that is yet to be determined in the regulations that we can expect at some date in the future. These types of decisions would be made behind closed doors rather than by elected officials in the House.

I am curious if the member could indicate how that would be determined. Which services would be scoped in, and which services would be allowed to continue to allow predatory practices with regard to our young people? Clearly, not all would be held accountable.

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her very thoughtful comment and feedback on this important issue. I will start by saying that naming specific platforms may be problematic because legislation needs to be agnostic. What we really need to focus on is the technology and the algorithms that continue to evolve. Some companies, such as Facebook and Instagram, that exist today may not exist tomorrow. We need to write a piece of legislation that passes the test of time, so to speak, so I think our focus really should be on the harms and how to reduce their impact. That is why the regulator would be really important, because it could do the analysis to ensure that the regulations would address the harms we are trying to address here.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague two quick questions.

Would it have been appropriate to extend the bill's scope to cover things like online gaming? How can we ensure that people under the age of 16 comply with the bill's provisions?

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for those very important questions.

[*English*]

The second question is the one I was trying to address. It is one thing to say that the age is 16, but the enforcement of the rule is extremely important. That is one of the conversations I have had with my constituents that came up again and again. We can set up a lot of rules, but if the rules are not followed or enforced, they become meaningless. That is a concern I bring. I want to make sure the legislation would have a meaningful way of addressing that concern. I think that ideas and suggestions from all of us would make that happen. We do not want to create a black market, so to speak, for young people to find a back door to get to these types of things.

We all have been young, and we know how creative we could be if we wanted something. However, this is not a new experience for us. There are restrictions on the use of alcohol and tobacco, on driving, and those types of things, so we know how to do this right and should think about how we can enforce the age of 16 thoroughly to get it right.

● (1025)

[*Translation*]

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague from Ottawa Centre. I really appreciated the fact that he reached out to his constituents in different ways. I have done the same thing in my riding. I talked to the youth council, for instance. Young people in my riding told me that they strongly support stricter regulations governing the use of social media. They also talked about the many benefits of not being constantly active on social media.

I would like to know whether my colleague has done similar research with young people. How do the youth in his riding feel about regulations governing social media?

[*English*]

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I also spoke with my youth council on this important issue. What is funny is that there is a group of young people who do want strict regulations because they believe there are concerns with respect to social media. They want to be responsible users, and they want help from government regulators. Then there are other young people who want us to leave them alone. We need to find the right balance and the enforcement that would help reduce the harms regarding social media.

Hon. Mike Lake (Leduc—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this piece of legislation today. I have been thinking for some time about the issues raised by the legislation, in my capacity as shadow minister for mental health and wellness and in working with many stakeholders who are very concerned about the impact of social media on our kids.

To start, I am actually going to talk about something from my own experience that I think speaks to the very things we are talking about today. A few months ago, my mom was having a fairly minor surgery. One night as I was getting ready for bed, I thought I should text my mom to find out how her surgery went. The next morning, for whatever reason, I was about to text her about something else. I opened up my phone and realized I had never texted my mom the night before to ask her about her surgery. What I had done was open my phone with the full intention of sending a text, but I saw an Instagram notification, just that little dot on the Instagram logo that we cannot ignore, and clicked on something that was not important at all.

Instagram was just getting my attention, as it does. I spent probably an hour scrolling reels on Instagram, and none of those reels was important. The types of reels that get my attention on Instagram, generally, are fantastic sports plays set to great music. Certain comedians also get my attention, so my algorithm has Nate Bargatze, Jimmy Carr and other comedians. It also has videos that explain things through AI-generated songs that are kind of funny and maybe clever, maybe not filled with really accurate information. I do not know.

The other thing, though, that I notice about my algorithm is that it is filled with some things that are not so light. Recently, oftentimes, my feed would be filled with crash videos, sometimes plane crash videos. I fly a lot, and for whatever reason, if I see a piece of video or something like that, I will linger on it maybe a little longer than I should. I have noticed recently that my feed is filled with RIP content about people who have recently passed away. In retrospect, I know why that has happened. I believe in the JFK quote "Things do not happen. Things are made to happen."

There is a reason why I see what I see. It is that a few prominent people whom I followed have passed away in recent times, and I read the stories about them. It was enough to feed my algorithm, and now what has happened is that my algorithm has way more content related to sadness and death than it used to have. What this has done is manipulated my natural love for people, my natural empathy for people, and has replaced that with a kind of rumination on tragedy, I would say.

One other comment is that on X, there is the ability, in some cases, to say, "I am not interested in this." I have a specific ad that keeps popping up on X, a series of ads. I have clicked "not interested in this" at least four or five times, but they just keeps coming anyway. I cannot get rid of them.

What does that look like for kids? I think that is the question we have to answer today. It is one thing as a 57-year-old to be drawn into social media. I would not phrase it as an addiction for me right now, but it definitely is something that is very compelling and takes me away from things I care about doing. What does that look like for a 13- 14- or 15-year-old? They might sit down to look something up on their phone to do some homework or study for something, or maybe there is something that would just be interesting that adds value to their life, or they are texting a friend to make plans, but they get locked into some kind of notification or addictive scrolling session that might last an hour, or two or three hours, when they were just going on their phone to make plans with their friends to do something in person.

● (1030)

What does the content look like for kids? Too often, we are hearing that the content that our kids are seeing on there might be related to eating disorders or to the way that someone ought to look. It might be related, in many cases now, to gambling. Maybe it is just fun games at first, but it does not take very long before the algorithm starts to feed them gambling ads. Pornography is another thing that is drawing many kids in.

There is a question that we have to ask ourselves, because some people might have a conversation. I think there are some legitimate conversations around free speech in the debate. It will be interesting to see when we go to committee and hear from experts on the impact of other parts of the bill as they relate to free speech. However I would say, for the social media part, for me personally as I am looking at this, I do not see the issue of whether a 15-year-old should have access to social media as a free speech issue. In my view, 15-year-olds are not equipped to be signing contracts with social media behemoths and signing away access to their attention, which is what is happening.

It is not a coincidence that we are all seeing what we see on our social media feeds. It is not a coincidence that kids are seeing what they are seeing on their social media feeds. People are paying for them to see what they are seeing on their social media feeds, and the more time they spend on their devices, the more money someone makes in the background. That is an issue. Again, I do not believe that 15-year-olds are equipped to be entering into contracts that they do not fully understand and that tie them into seeing things that they did not expect to see and do not understand why they are seeing them.

I have a quote from C.S. Lewis that I love, and I think it kind of highlights where we are right now. He said:

> We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.

I want to think about the place we want to be, which C.S. Lewis talks about. I think we all want to be in a place where our kids can thrive, where we all can thrive, where we all can flourish and where we all can live up to our potential. I like to think of a world where our kids can play like we used to play.

Jonathan Haidt's work has been raised in a lot of the conversations around social media age limits particularly, of course. He has four norms that he points to, in terms of his work. He talks not only about a social media age limit, but also about a restriction on smartphones in schools, which provinces across this country have enacted. He talks about parents deciding to delay smartphone access for their kids to 14 years old. The fourth norm is more play in the real world. There is incredible research being done on the power of play in the real world.

I think of my friend Lenore Skenazy and her work on free-range kids, and Mariana Brussoni, a Canadian who does incredible work on unstructured play and the power of risky play. If we are going to go down a road with less social media access for kids, we have to have alternatives for our kids to undertake. I would say, as a country, one thing that we have to look at is where the spaces are where our kids can get outside and play, so more green space, but more green space where kids are safe to explore like we used to explore.

I know my time is running short right now. I am very much looking forward to this bill getting to committee. I think there are some legitimate concerns that folks would have about the bill that relate to fairly undefined powers of a regulator, the impact of some of the freedom of speech provisions within the bill that are not related necessarily to a social media age limit, and others.

Right now, I look forward to questions, but I really look forward to the conversations that are going to happen at committee on the bill.

● (1035)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was listening closely to the member opposite's speech, and as a parent of an 18-year-old and a 20-year-old, I really agree with pretty much everything that he had to say here. That is a rare occurrence in this House. One of the things that I think about quite often is that my kids grew up with social media from day one, so the amount of data and information that has been collected from their lives when they are posting and when they are contributing on those platforms is really concerning. We see dystopian movies where targeted ads follow people around. I think some of the members' comments about unstructured play, getting outside and touching grass are also really important for youth.

I would like to know his comments on what he is hearing from other parents.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. Of course, I assume we have all been lobbied by the unplugged folks who are so passionate about this issue on behalf of their kids, which I think is more than 10,000 strong in terms of the impact. We have all gone back to our constituencies and talked to people.

In relation to the privacy issues the member raises, I want to give kudos to the member for Lethbridge who has consistently, as we have been having this conversation, been raising those issues. I expect they will be significantly raised in the committee as well.

Again, I come back to my focus and the work I have been doing and intend to be doing. There is a real power to play, and in order to make room for play, getting off or reducing time on our devices is going to be critical.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the legislation, the many implications it could have become pretty clear. If the government wants to regulate certain online platforms, for instance, it has to include some form of education for young people. It also means taking action on content that may differ depending on whether one is francophone or anglophone.

What I find especially unfortunate is that the bill does not include any obligation for the federal government to consult with the provinces or seek any kind of alignment, particularly with Quebec, which is a distinct society and has a different culture.

Would my colleague agree that the government has missed the mark a bit with the one-size-fits-all measures set out in the bill? That said, I completely agree on the importance of the bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, as a member of Parliament from Alberta, I would share those thoughts. Obviously, if the committee is given a strong enough mandate and enough time to study this piece of legislation, provinces will have a chance to weigh in, either at committee or by sending comments to the committee, and I think that would be really important.

It is important to me, more than almost any other piece of legislation I have seen, that Parliament, through the committee process right now, take the time to get this right. There are many legitimate concerns that have been raised, and it is very important that the committee that undertakes this study take the time to really hear those concerns and get it right.

● (1040)

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his passionate speech and the incredible work he has done on this file over years, if not a decade, as a member of Parliament.

Bill C-34 does not outline the types of design features that should be put in place by platforms in order to keep kids safe. That is going to be determined later on. Given the member's tremendous amount of research and expertise in this area, I wonder if there are two or three design features he would hope to see come out of the regulatory framework that would be created.

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, when we take a look at the different design features, such as infinite scroll, one of the conversations we need to have, and this is broader than just children, is on some transparency around why we see what we see. I think, for all of us, that is a huge issue. We just take what is given to us and go on to the next thing, and we do not know why we are seeing what we see. Some transparency around that is tremendously important. Again, this will probably be one of the key things that the committee looks at from witnesses who—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to hear the rest at another time.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the safe social media act. This topic holds considerable interest for many people in my riding of La Prairie—Atateken. I sincerely thank everyone who shared their views with me.

I want to start by addressing a reality that is quite familiar to families in my riding. In Candiac, Saint-Constant, Kahnawake and other communities across the country, the first thing that many young people see on a screen in the morning and the last thing they see at night is an app. These services have real and undeniable benefits. They provide information, bring people closer together, and offer an outlet for creativity. However, they also expose our children to risks that we would never tolerate in other circumstances. The numbers are clear: One in four young people aged 12 to 17 say they have been cyber-bullied. Reports to police concerning online child sexual exploitation are increasing dramatically. In 2023-24, the RCMP received over 100,000 reports in Canada alone in a single year.

Young people harmed in this way are much more likely to suffer from mental health issues, including suicidal ideation. Fourteen years ago, Amanda Todd took her own life because she was a victim of sextortion and cyber-bullying. Since then, two bills addressing online harm have died on the Order Paper. Victims and their families tell us that they have waited too long, and they are right. For a time, we hoped that the companies would take the necessary steps to keep our youth safe, but Canadians' trust has eroded. Their voluntary action has never kept pace with the scale, speed and severity of the harm caused. In addition to individuals' predatory behaviour, there are also design flaws, algorithmic recommendations, autoplay and infinite scroll. These are engineering choices that amplify harmful content. Worse still, today, AI chatbots are forming unhealthy, sustained relationships with young people, sometimes during the most difficult times of their lives. Tumbler Ridge is one example.

Bill C-34 is based on a simple principle: The people who design these services must be held accountable for the risks they create. The bill establishes two pieces of legislation: the digital safety act and the digital safety commission of Canada act. Allow me to outline their key provisions.

First, there is a duty to protect children. All regulated services will be required to integrate safe design features and implement age restrictions. As for social media, the government has provided that children must be at least 16 years old to have an account. However, the commission can grant exceptions to platforms that demonstrate that they have implemented and maintained sufficient protections for children. In other words, we are not closing the door. We are setting a standard.

Access to pornographic content must also be restricted using adequate age verification and age estimation measures. This responds to a call for action from our communities. In the spring, digital entrepreneurs and experts from Quebec, including some from my riding, launched an online initiative called AgeStandard, which calls for the enforcement of the 16-year-old age limit on social media. Thousands of people have signed the petition. Their message is simple: A check box has never protected a child. They are right.

Second, there is a duty to remove two types of content that do not belong anywhere: child sex abuse material and intimate images shared without consent, including sexual deepfakes. Social media platforms will be required to make such content inaccessible within 24 hours of it being flagged or reported, through a notice and appeal process. For a victim, every hour counts.

Third, there is a duty to act responsibly. Platforms will have to mitigate the risk of exposure to seven categories of harmful content, including content that induces a child to harm themselves, content used to bully a child, content that foments hatred, content that incites violence, and violent extremism content. They will have to provide simple tools for blocking, reporting and labelling synthetic content, and a readily available resource person.

● (1045)

Fourth, the bill establishes rules governing AI chatbots. If I am not mistaken, this is a world first. As soon as a user expresses suicidal thoughts or the intention to self-harm or hurt others, the service must immediately interrupt its interaction with the user and direct the user toward crisis intervention services that permit the user to interact with a human being. The chatbot may not pose as a human being or a professional, nor use manipulative engagement techniques to maintain an emotional attachment that causes the user to withdraw socially.

Fifth, the bill provides for greater transparency. Each regulated service must submit a digital safety plan containing information on the risks, the measures implemented and their effectiveness. Accredited researchers will be able to access the data. The days when platforms had to be taken at their word are over.

Lastly, the digital safety commission of Canada will be created and equipped with real technical expertise to develop standards, conduct audits, receive public complaints and impose penalties. Penalties for violations could be up to 3% of gross global revenue or $10 million. Convictions on indictment could lead to fines of up to 5% or $20 million, whichever is greater. For companies of this size, this is what sets a recommendation apart from a requirement.

Colleagues in this House, experts and citizens have raised serious concerns that deserve to be examined. First, there is a concern about freedom of expression. In my opinion, freedom of speech is not affected. For example, this bill does not apply to private messaging. It does not require platforms to proactively monitor everything that is being posted. It concerns these services' design and risk management. That is a fundamental difference.

We have also heard concerns about privacy and age verification. I share those concerns. Nobody here wants Canadians to have to hand over a piece of ID to watch a video. Where necessary, this verification should be done automatically. It will need to be properly regulated. This is something the committee will need to look at closely, particularly with the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

I also want to acknowledge the sustained effort put in by Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne, whose bill, Bill S-209, has passed in the Senate and is now before the House. It aims to restrict young people's access to online pornography. Both bills have the same goal, and I hope the work done in committee will result in a consistent set of clear rules on age verification, rather than trying to impose two parallel systems on the same platforms. There is a way to do just that.

Some have said that too many details are being left to the regulations. That is a valid criticism, but as we know, technology evolves faster than we legislate. That is why it makes sense to enshrine the principles, obligations and penalties in law and to entrust the technical details to an expert body that can adapt as needed. There will be an opportunity at the committee stage to clarify what needs to be in the legislation itself.

Lastly, efforts are also under way elsewhere. The National Assembly of Quebec examined the effects of screen time on young people and focused on the role of schools and on support for families. Our bill addresses this issue by seeking to regulate global platforms. This is where the federal Parliament has a role to play. Platforms have a duty toward the children who use them, and that duty must be enshrined in law. I sincerely believe that the safety of our children is non-negotiable, as the minister said earlier.

The survivors have issued a call to us: If this bill is intended to build a safer digital future, then let it be built together with them. I urge all my colleagues to heed this call.

● (1050)

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his interesting speech.

In its charter statement, the Department of Justice recognizes that the bill engages freedom of expression guaranteed under section 2(b) and the right to equality guaranteed under section 15 because it makes a distinction based on age, as well as the right to privacy under section 8 because the age verification or age estimation measures may require the collection of personal information.

What strikes me is that the charter statement is based on guidelines that will be developed later by the commission, on future regulations, and on an exemption for services that provide—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member to give the parliamentary secretary the opportunity to respond.

Jacques Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question, and I thank my colleague for asking it. I am a big believer in technological advances. The AgeStandard initiative that I mentioned earlier is suggesting that age verification be done by analyzing facial features, without seeking to identify the individual, or in other words, an automated age verification process that does not collect any personal information. That is just one example of what could be used. I think that members will have the opportunity in committee to examine charter compliance, which must always come first. I think it is possible to do that with Bill C-41 and the charter.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage considered the issue, it adopted the following recommendation:

> That the Government of Canada, in addressing the effects of influencers and social media on children and adolescents—and while recognizing the jurisdiction and primacy of the provinces in matters relating to social services and youth protection—adopt an asymmetrical and flexible approach.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague how, with Bill C-34, the government is taking an asymmetrical and flexible approach that recognizes the jurisdiction and primacy of Quebec and the provinces and how the government consulted and worked with Quebec and the provinces on this bill.

Jacques Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I think the two approaches are complementary. I have been watching the work of the Quebec National Assembly. It has focused on the effects of screen use in school, how families can better support their children, and specific health and education issues. I believe that Bill C-41 addresses problems created by global platforms. I also believe the federal government has a fundamental role to play in establishing appropriate standards while giving platforms an opportunity to adapt. If they do so, then there will be no need for age verification. If they do not, I think it is our duty to intervene. I think this approach is in line with what almost all Quebeckers want.

● (1055)

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this bill does something very important: Anything that is currently illegal in the real world will also be illegal in the digital world. How can we ensure compliance with our laws?

Jacques Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, my colleague just made a very important point. Bill C-41 does what is being done elsewhere. It regulates things that are not allowed, such as bullying and sexual exploitation. Basically, we need to recognize that online life is just as important in this day and age. We are doing that by introducing regulations that will evolve as technology evolves.

[*English*]

Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour and a pleasure to rise in the House as the voice of Calgary Midnapore. I am so grateful for my citizens. Many of my citizens, including my parents, of course, and myself, are parents. When we talk about being a parent, we may have many other titles and roles in our lives. We may be a sister or a cousin. In our work, we have many roles. We may be a colleague, perhaps a subordinate or even a leader, a boss, someone who has to take the care and responsibility of others into consideration. I know that any parent, not only in Calgary Midnapore but across Canada, would agree that there is nothing more important than their role as a parent and the safety of their children. We all love our children. I cannot think of anything more dear or precious to me than my son, and I know all parents feel this way about their children.

It should be known to Canadians that protecting kids online is non-negotiable for Conservatives. However, good intentions require sound mechanisms. We must be focused on holding tech giants accountable and empowering parents, not expanding government bureaucracy. As this bill moves to committee, we will scrutinize its provisions to ensure that it delivers real protection for children. As a parent, I want nothing more than that for our children and for the parents of Canada.

Online harms are a real problem, and the problem is twofold. Number one, children are exposed to addictive platforms. I see this in my household, and when friends come over, all the time. There is inappropriate content, exploitation and many other harms. Secondly, parents are overwhelmed by rapidly changing technology and fighting an uphill battle against big tech. This was never more prevalent than during COVID, when all parents across the nation all of a sudden had to become IT consultants, so to speak, as they navigated schooling for their children during that difficult time.

These are real problems. According to Statistics Canada, one in four children aged 12 to 17 has experienced cyber-bullying, and police reported online child sexual exploitation incidents reaching 16,905 in 2024, up 347% from 2014. Cyber-victimization is also associated with serious mental health outcomes, including suicidal ideation and attempts. Canada has experienced the devastating impacts and real-world consequences of online harms. The tragic case of Amanda Todd, who died by suicide after experiencing sextortion and cyber-bullying, illustrates the devastating impact these harms can have on young people. In addition, I have two examples from my home province of Alberta.

Dated September 25, the headline on the first article states, “After 2 youths stalked on Snapchat, review your kid’s settings, police urge”. The article reads, “Police in Alberta are urging parents to check the location settings on their children’s social media and communication apps after two youth allegedly being sexually exploited in Edmonton were followed to their homes.” This is outlining the threats. “'The victims reported that they complied out of extreme fear for their safety and the safety of their family,'” again outlining the threats.

The article continues: “The suspect allegedly tracked the victim’s location via Snapchat and travelled to their family home. ALERT said they allegedly knew both the victims’ home address and what school they attended.” This is the type of threat that exists as a result of social media. That is one example from my home province of Alberta.

The headline on the second article says, “Edmonton teens, 14, charged after AI used to make sexualized images of classmates”. The article states, “Two Edmonton junior high students are facing child sexual exploitation charges for allegedly using AI to generate sexualized images of classmates. Such charges are only the tip of the iceberg in an emerging area of online child sex abuse, police say, adding it remains difficult to hold AI platforms themselves accountable.”

● (1100)

Problems for children are many, and children spend a large portion of their lives online. For today's youth, digital platforms are not separate from everyday life. This is where they socialize, build relationships, access information, express themselves and, increasingly, interact with AI. As a result, what happens online can have profound real-world consequences, including exposure to cyber-bullying, sexual exploitation, self-harm and eating disorder content, violence, and other harmful material.

Children are vulnerable to the ways that platforms are designed. Platform features, such as recommendation algorithms, push notifications, endless scrolling and autoplay can repeatedly direct youth towards 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 used by young people, creating new and largely untested risks.

In addition to problems for children, there are problems for parents. Parents cannot solve the problem alone, and they are asking for help. They can set boundaries, monitor devices and talk to children about online safety. We have done all of this in my home, but parents cannot control how platforms and algorithms recommend content, prevent strangers from contacting their children or remove harmful material at scale.

Parents need technology companies and governments to share responsibility for creating a safer online environment for children. We do not ask parents to enforce car seat standards or alcohol laws by themselves, and online safety should be no different. In fact, according to an Angus Reid survey, 75% of Canadians, and 70% of parents with children in the home, support banning social media for youth under 16.

I will give an example in my province of such legislation. This legislation exists not only in Alberta but also across other provinces in the federation. On June 17, 2024, it was decreed:

> Parents, teachers, students and our education partners were clear that the use of personal mobile devices and social media in the classroom was of concern. We're taking a measured approach to protect students by restricting the use of personal mobile devices during instructional time to reduce distractions and bullying, maximize learning time and support student mental health.

This is one province that has taken an approach to such threats and such risks, because the threats, as I said, are very much real.

We need to consider also the duties of operators, because these operators have a duty to protect our children. They should require social media services and chatbot services to implement design features respecting the protection of children, as per future regulations. They should require social media services to implement age verification estimation to prevent users who are under 16 from setting up or maintaining accounts. As well, they should require regulated services that provide access to pornographic material to implement age verification or age estimation to prevent children from getting access to these platforms. These operators have a duty to act responsibly. They should require social media services and chatbots to assess and mitigate the risks associated with several categories of harmful content. As well, they have a duty to make certain that certain content is inaccessible and require social media services to take down content that sexually victimizes children.

Our Conservative principles regarding online safety are clear, and as a parent and as a mother, I ask the government to consider them.

● (1105)

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member's speech. I am really glad that there is a lot of consensus across all parties on this bill.

This is so essential in my role, and I have heard briefing after briefing. We have talked about a lot of different crimes, but on the harm that is happening to our children online, as the member pointed out, we have seen an increase of over 400% over the last decade, and even year on year, about a 64% increase in luring children online.

I want to thank the RCMP for all the work it does to combat this issue, but holding social media companies liable is a really important part of this piece. I want to hear the members' comments on reporting to police services.

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to hear my colleague across the aisle indicate that she believes holding social media platforms accountable for the safety of our children is important. It indicates to me that she recognizes that her role as a government member is to create this environment and enforce it with social media platforms.

In this moment, I think that Canadians and parents across Canada are uncertain if the government is willing to do the difficult things and stand up to big social media regarding keeping our children safe. I will take her words and her commentary as an acceptance of the responsibility of government to hold social media companies to account.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, indeed, the time has come to deal with this situation.

My question is this. In our society, which level of government is ultimately responsible for protecting young people? I am thinking of the young people in Quebec, for example.

Would my colleague agree that, while legislation is needed, it is up to the Quebec nation to have a serious discussion about these legislative choices?

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I think it is everyone's responsibility to protect young people. I think that is probably the most important aspect of the bill. Protecting young people is up to me, as a parent, but it is also up to the government and companies. I hope the government will accept its responsibility in that regard.

[*English*]

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the member's speech, she mentioned that, although the bill is well-intentioned and there are some good elements to it, one of her concerns was the potential of adding additional bureaucracy, which could slow down some of the things we are trying to accomplish with the bill, certainly in ensuring that the tools are there for our law enforcement to act on these things.

Could the member build on some of her concerns regarding other elements of the bill, including the bureaucracy, that are a concern to our stakeholders?

● (1110)

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

There are three concerns when it comes to bureaucracy. The first, of course, is that bureaucracy always has a price, and with this government, it is a very big one. Second, a bureaucracy allows the government and the ministers to deflect responsibility back onto the bureaucracy when they themselves should be taking responsibility, especially in a situation where something so precious as our children is involved. Finally, a bureaucracy gives unelected officials power to harm people. I am very concerned about the bureaucratic aspects of this, because as we can see, the risks are many.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the fact that the government is looking at regulating social media among young people. I also commend the leadership shown by the Premier of Quebec, who was one of the first people in Quebec to raise this issue. Other western countries are also considering this.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I think I am bothering one of my colleagues. I hope it is not just because I am speaking French.

Some countries are taking a bold approach. Others are waiting to see what kind of legislation is passed and may take their cue from what we do here.

I am certainly not the only one who sees people my age in my circle of friends who go into a trance as soon as they open Instagram or TikTok, although that app is not as popular as it once was. Of course, there are also the short videos on Facebook.

The tech giants understand human nature. They understand the weaknesses of the human mind, how our attention span works and, most importantly, how to keep us hooked. They know how to get our attention and feed us content that can make us lose all sense of time. I do not think there is a single person here who has not experienced this. In fact, many of the people who created these platforms admit that they too fall victim to their own tactics and this game. Our partners, our children, our friends—all are susceptible.

The difference is that we are adults and we have free will. In theory, we are equipped to understand these dangers but, as with any addiction, it is difficult to break free, especially once we have lost track of time.

Now, let us think about all the 12-year-old boys and girls who are just starting junior high. Their parents buy them a cellphone because they want to keep track of where they are going and because junior high brings with it a new kind of freedom. Parents also want to be able to contact their children. There are all sorts of good reasons for these kids to have cellphones. We are no longer talking about the old flip phones that no one wanted to send text messages on because it took too long. Kids can now get on the Internet with their phones. They have access to social media. There are apps to block social media, but let us be serious. Young people want a digital presence. It is important to point that out. We obviously have to keep up with the times. That is why Bill C-34 is so important.

Digital communication is at now at the centre of our lives. If we do not regulate it, we are leaving young people to navigate these platforms alone, platforms where they may be exposed to cyberbullying, content that is not age appropriate and mechanisms designed to keep them online into the wee hours of the morning. I remember when I was old enough to get my driver's licence, I was told to save my money so that I could buy myself a car. A car does not come for free and it comes with rules. It is important to know how to navigate this digital world because, even though it may be intangible, there are still public health and safety issues to consider.

There is also something that is not as easy to pick up on among young people: young people who isolate themselves, who become withdrawn and whose mental health could be affected by online pressure and interactions. When I talk about interactions, I think about the fact that every second we are in front of a screen adds up. Screen time could even take the place of time spent sleeping. We also know that the amount of time spent doing physical activity and being physically present with others is decreasing. We all know that sedentary lifestyles can be harmful to physical health. In addition, online pressure and interactions can take a heavy toll on mental health. These effects are real and cannot be ignored. The pandemic reminded us just how much young people need to interact with others in order to learn to socialize. When so many of our interactions are happening only online, socialization becomes more difficult and some people may withdraw into themselves.

● (1115)

I am sure that my very attentive colleagues agree. We must learn from what is happening now and help both current and future generations develop a healthy relationship with digital tools without becoming dependent on them.

On social media, young people see digitally enhanced bodies and carefully curated lives. Success often appears effortless, but comparing ourselves to those images can leave us feeling that we are not attractive enough, popular enough or successful enough. In fact, a study of just over 21,000 youth aged 10 to 17 in six countries, including Canada, found that 55% were dissatisfied with their appearance. One could argue that not many of us are satisfied, but dissatisfaction tends to increase as time spent on social media increases.

We already use this approach for other products. For instance, tobacco advertising, packaging and warnings are regulated. The same goes for cannabis. There is a minimum age, and marketing aimed at young people is tightly restricted. With social media, the risks are different, but the principle is the same: Protect people and prevent harm through regulations. Limiting young people's access is therefore a public health measure, not arbitrary control. We need to make that distinction.

We in the Bloc Québécois think it is normal and preferable for laws to adapt quickly to technological changes. Our laws are lagging far behind, and this gap must be closed to keep up with the accelerating pace of AI. Even the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for rules to protect children across all social media. These are the rules we are being called upon to discuss and debate as we study Bill C-34. I hope that the discussions will be very constructive once the bill passes this stage and that the committee will come up with effective measures to keep our young people on the right track.

What rules should we bring in to regulate social media and protect young people? Which level of government within the Canadian federation has the jurisdiction to address this challenge? These are questions that need to be asked as this bill proposes a federal regulatory framework for social media and chatbots.

This bill would also impose a number of duties on digital platforms, including a duty to protect minors and to make certain content inaccessible. This will, in fact, help to educate parents. The bill places obligations on these platforms, including requirements to remove content depicting sexual victimization and non-consensual intimate images. It proposes a range of principles, obligations and enforcement mechanisms aimed at holding digital platforms accountable, protecting minors and ensuring online safety.

The Bloc Québécois supports these objectives and sees the positive side of a number of the principles and proposed solutions. However, each of these measures will require careful examination. I repeat that, in committee, I hope we will ensure that our decisions are guided by science, facts and research, and not simply guided by assumptions or, I dare say, partisan politics. As the Bloc Québécois has always maintained, we must also ensure that the federal government does not encroach on areas of jurisdiction that belong to Quebec and the provinces.

In conclusion, in 2024 and 2025, Quebec's National Assembly established a Select Committee on the Impacts of Screens and Social Media on Young People's Health and Development. Let us draw on the work of our counterparts to ensure a healthy digital environment for our young people.

● (1120)

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciated the speech by my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle.

I must acknowledge that the Bloc Québécois has consistently advocated strong measures to combat cyber-bullying and threats of all kinds directed at children. Those are values we share. In the case of this bill, many of its provisions are aimed at preventing the commission and perpetuation of criminal offences.

I want to know whether my colleague agrees that prevention should be one of the main objectives of a bill like this one.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Speaker, what a great question from my colleague.

I come from the community sector, a sector that is stretched thin in Quebec, and I know that prevention is key. Indeed, when we see the strategies being used by platforms that turn young people into zombies, we understand that safeguards need to be implemented. We need to invest more and develop a legislative framework that protects the physical and mental health of our young people.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate and thank my colleague and friend, the member for Laurentides—Labelle, for her great speech. The topic is important, and she addressed it with heartfelt conviction.

The issue covered by this bill touches on many areas of jurisdiction that belong to Quebec and the provinces, including social services, youth protection and other related sectors.

In my colleague's view, has the government worked closely enough with Quebec and the provinces on this matter? Did it adequately consult the other levels of government before introducing this bill?

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the question we are asking.

We are perfectly comfortable with the bill and we hope it will pass into law. Once it is referred to committee, I hope that Quebec and the provinces will be consulted, considering the research they conducted, the evidence they gathered from scientists and the measures they implemented that we need to use for inspiration.

The government may have consulted the provinces to some degree, but a lot more such consultation is needed.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank our colleague for her speech.

I thank her for supporting the measures proposed by the Canadian government to protect young people and for recognizing that this is a shared responsibility. The Canadian government has a responsibility, including because social media has no borders.

It is an excellent recognition of the role of the Canadian government, which must act in collaboration with other players, of course.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the new government at the National Assembly of Quebec includes people who are very competent. I must say that the MNA for the Laurentians, Anne Nguyen, has a great deal of expertise.

I cannot wait for the bill to see the light of day because it is high time this law was implemented quickly, especially given that artificial intelligence is so pervasive in our lives.

● (1125)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my colleague said that she hoped her colleagues were listening attentively. We certainly were, because right after, she talked about how it is important to protect the younger generation.

In that spirit, under the framework of the bill, instead of an outright ban on social media, it would allow certain platforms to be exempt from the age verification obligations if they can show that they have a robust safety plan in place.

I want to know what my colleague thinks of this approach. Rather than being subject an outright ban, platforms would be given an opportunity to implement preventative measures. What does she think about that?

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Speaker, in less than 30 seconds, I will say that the government needs to consult public safety stakeholders and every province and territory. I think the government will then get feedback that would likely be very positive.

That said, I would remind the House that it is also important for the government to focus on its own affairs.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-41—PROPOSAL TO APPLY STANDING ORDER 69.1

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the point of order raised by the member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South respecting the application of Standing Order 69.1 to Bill C-41, the medical assistance in dying safeguards act.

Bill C-41 proposes substantive amendments to the Criminal Code to deal with medical assistance in dying. As a result of these amendments, other acts of Parliament would be amended as a consequence for the sole purpose of the amendments made to the Criminal Code respecting the medical assistance in dying regime.

Paragraph 12.50 of the fourth edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states in relation to the division of an omnibus bill, "The Standing Orders define an omnibus bill as a bill intended to modify, repeal or enact more than one law with no common thread or which concern unrelated topics."

The stated bill, Bill C-41, deals with the singular issue of medical assistance in dying and no unrelated topics. The member has clearly acknowledged this in his intervention when he stated, "I recognize that these matters concern medical assistance in dying."

To demonstrate how closely intertwined the two medical assistance in dying matters addressed in the bill are linked, I would draw the attention of members to subclause 5(9), which states, "A mental illness is not an illness or disease in respect of which an advance request may be made."

The bill clearly deals with medical assistance in dying as a common element and theme and contains no unrelated provisions dealing with unrelated matters.

Taken to its logical end, if what the member is proposing were to be accepted, each and every bill the government introduces that contains a common element and deals with no unrelated matters could be subject to multiple votes at the second reading and third reading stages and would put the Speaker in an awkward position to classify bills according to how strongly some members feel about the subject matter contained therein.

I submit that the appropriate place for members to consider the clauses of the bill is at committee where, unlike at second reading, members may propose amendments or simply vote against clauses they oppose.

I conclude that Bill C-41, for which the substantive proposed amendments relate to the medical assistance in dying regime in the Criminal Code, does not in any way constitute an omnibus bill and, therefore, the application of Standing Order 69.1 does not apply. I would encourage the House to expeditiously refer the bill to committee where members can examine, consider and propose amendments to the individual clauses.

The Deputy Speaker: So noted.

* * *

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.

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many parents and grandparents in this room and listening who, I am sure, all want the same thing: to know that when our children or grandchildren go online, they are safe. We want our children to be able to talk to friends, learn new things, play games and research their interests without worrying that someone might be trying to exploit them, bully them or expose them to things they are not ready to see. For many parents, that peace of mind is hard to find.

Parents can do everything right. They can set rules for screen time, monitor what sites their children visit and even teach them about online harms and safety or what to do when they feel uncomfortable. What parents cannot control is what a social media site recommends to their child. They cannot personally review every single message that their child receives, and they cannot make a tech company remove harmful content just because it puts their child at risk. That is the challenge we are facing today.

Children are spending more of their time online than ever before. The risks they are facing change as fast as the technology does. One in four Canadian children between the ages of 12 and 17 has experienced cyber-bullying. In 2024, police reported that online child exploitation reached 16,905 children, up 347% from 2014. Behind those numbers are real families and real children who have real trauma from it. We have seen the consequences of online harm in cases like that of Amanda Todd.

As AI becomes more common and more integrated into our children's lives, we need to know where the responsibility lies when something goes wrong. This brings us to Bill C-34. The bill proposes responsibilities for social media companies and AI chatbots. It would require them to take steps to protect children and address harmful content. It would also establish the new digital safety commission of Canada to oversee compliance, investigate complaints and enforce the rules.

I think we can all agree that we want our children to be safe online. The question is, how do we get there? Good intentions are not enough. For too long, parents have been expected to manage these risks alone. We can think about how social media works for one second. What is recommended is not random. It is designed to keep people watching. It is designed for children to keep scrolling, the video playbacks to be played based on what they are viewing, and constant ads or continual use by children as they scroll through the platforms. These features can make it difficult for young people to put their phones down. It can also affect what content a child will see next.

Technology companies make decisions about how their products work, but they also need to take responsibility. Bill C-34 proposes requirements for safer design, but that raises a question. What does safer design mean, and how will we know what changes are working? Parents do not have the comfort to wait years to find out what these changes will bring. We need clear expectations, measurable results and a way to hold companies accountable when they fall short.

This brings me to another part of the bill, on age restrictions. Bill C-34 would require social media apps to verify age to prevent users under the age of 16 from having accounts. The intention is understandable. There are legitimate concerns about the effects of social media on young people. Many parents today are already doing what they can to limit or restrict social media use. My question is, what if a teenager is determined to still use these platforms? They may move to a site that is less known and has fewer safeguards. They may end up giving their parents even less visibility into what is happening. A restriction is only effective if it can be enforced and it keeps children safe in the process.

We also need to ask how this verification would work. If Canadians have to provide some sort of identification or other personal information to prove their age, how will that information be protected? We need to make sure that in the effort to protect our children, we do not create unnecessary risks for everyone, including our children. We also need to consider the role of parents. Parents know their children. They understand their needs better than anybody else, especially in ways the government cannot. A parent may decide that their 15-year-old is not ready for online activities, while another says that potentially theirs is.

● (1130)

We do not know this yet. Not all families will come to the same decision, and the law needs to account for how these rules would affect them. Parents cannot be expected to solve every single online problem on their own, and they have to be a part of this conversation. Online safety should be a shared responsibility. Yes, parents need the tools to help them make the best decisions for their own families, but big tech companies also need to do their part. The government must do its part as well.

Would these measures actually make children safer? Would tech companies be held accountable for the risks that these platforms create? Would parents have the tools needed to protect their children while their privacy is being respected? We need to have the answers as the bill moves forward.

Parents are asking for help, and technology companies should not be able to ignore the harms that their products are causing to children. Our responsibility is to make sure that the rules we put in place work to protect children and respect the rights of Canadians. At the end of the day, parents do not want another empty promise that the Internet will be safer. They need protections that actually work.

● (1135)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really important that we recognize that Bill C-34 is all about protecting the children in Canada. It would complement the wonderful job that parents and guardians provide, but it recognizes that the Internet is seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and that there is harmful content there.

What we are hoping to see from the Conservative Party is support in principle for a digital safety commission so that when we have the regulations, they would actually be enforced with, potentially, things like fines. There has to be a consequence that gives the legislation teeth in its actions to protect our children. In principle, does the member support the legislation and, in particular, the commission?

Kelly DeRidder: Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree that we absolutely want to keep our children safe. The whole principle of the bill is keeping our children safe on the platforms they are continually using. Every single day, this is where they gather. It is where they play. We need to ensure that tech companies are held accountable. We also agree that this legislation needs to have real teeth in it, absolutely. One of the things, though, that I have received emails about is the commission's powers and accountability. These are the things we are going to need to discuss in committee moving forward.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering whether my colleague shares my concern. As we have seen, the government has occasionally had a regrettable tendency to let the tech giants off easy. We need only think of the digital services tax or the levies, two areas where the government has backed down. We know that legislation like this is likely to displease platforms like Facebook. We also know how much influence these people can have on the U.S. President.

Does my colleague fear, as I do, that the government might end up backing down if the Americans were to exert economic pressure to persuade us not to go down this route?

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: Mr. Speaker, there is a piece in the legislation on the duties of operators, which would hold big tech accountable, and in there is the duty to act responsibly. It would require social media and these platforms and services like chatbots to assess and mitigate risks associated with seven categories of harmful content. Those categories are intimate content communicated without consent; content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor; content that induces a child to harm themselves; content used to bully a child; content that foments hatred; content that incites violence; and terrorism or violent extremism content.

A piece of this that we will have to look at when this moves to committee is ensuring that there would be true accountability by these content providers and that it is not just an illusion. As such, this is something that we will be talking about as this moves forward.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the debate, the member was asked about support for the creation of a commission, which is part of the act. I do not think a part of this, like the commission, could be or is a complete answer to the question of online harms. Some online harms are criminal acts. When crimes are committed, the commission of crime is a matter for law enforcement, not a commission. I think it is really important that we examine all of the issues around this bill and that we get it right.

Does the member agree that there are many questions that a parliamentary committee needs to address? Does she think there is likely room for amendment?

● (1140)

Kelly DeRidder: Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree. This is absolutely something that needs to be scrutinized as we move into committee. The commission would be a superregulator and be able to make its own decisions. Would there really be accountability in that, or is it just going to be another excuse, another layer of bureaucracy, where we would be able to pass blame instead of having real, true criminal accountability for a few of the items just discussed?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in second reading debate on Bill C-34, the safe social media act. Our government is focused on supporting victims of crime as well as the important work of protecting Canadians online. My time today will focus on how the bill would address these priorities through the types of harmful content covered and why it is necessary in protecting Canadians online.

While the online world continues to evolve, and our digital reality continues to change, platforms, self-expression and the exchange of information have given rise to a new set of challenges. Online platforms have algorithms designed for harmful content to spread and multiply, exposing users to terrible harm. Some platforms have limited rules, community standards or terms of service. However, those definitions, thresholds and practices vary hugely from service to service. One platform may label or remove content, but another may even promote it, creating visible inconsistencies and significant gaps in protection.

Canadians should be able to rely on a minimum baseline safety standard across all platforms. Bill C-34 would do this by defining specific categories of harmful content, including the following seven categories: content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes—

The Deputy Speaker: I need to interrupt the secretary of state.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets is rising on a point of order.

Mario Simard: I would like to remind my colleague not to let her papers touch the microphone. It is bad for the interpreters' ears.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Using speaking notes is of course allowed, but sometimes when members are removing them and putting them at their desk, they are tapping the microphones, and it makes it more difficult for our interpreters to do live translation.

I invite the secretary of state to continue her speech but perhaps to just make sure that the speaking notes, when she is through with them, be put to the side instead.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, I was addressing the following seven categories, which are outlined in the bill: first, content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor; second, intimate content communicated without consent; third, content used to bully a child; fourth, content that induces a child to harm themselves; fifth, content that foments hatred; sixth, content that incites violence; and, last, terrorism or violent extremism content.

The first category is content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor, which is among the most serious harms that this bill would address. I have travelled across the country and talked to law enforcement, and of course to the RCMP here in Ottawa, and cases involving this type of harmful content are on the rise. The pain caused by this kind of content is profound, ongoing and not limited to the original act of victimization. When such material is communicated, reproduced, circulated or re-encountered online, the harm is continuously experienced over time, each reappearance reviving the pain of the original trauma to the victim.

The second category is intimate content communicated without consent. This category has a particular gender dimension. Online harassment affects women at a much higher rate than men. This may take the form of revenge porn, which is a specific type of intimate content shared or posted without consent. It also manifests itself through sexual extortion, in which victims are forced to pay sums of money to have images taken down. In this category, the harm is deeply personal, often immediate and in many cases particularly devastating for the victims, whose dignity, privacy and autonomy are violated in an online world accessible to their friends and family.

The third category is content used to bully a child, which addresses the harm that many children experience online, but is not currently adequately or expeditiously addressed. Content used to bully a child can have significant cumulative and negative impacts on a child's physical and mental health, development and self-esteem. Over time, relationships can also be impacted by this type of harm.

Bill C-34's definition does not catch mere rudeness or criticism. The act's definition focuses on content that could cause serious harm to a child's physical or mental health. General expressions of opinion are not captured, and this carefully bounded definition addresses serious cyber-bullying while respecting broader expression.

The fourth category is content that induces a child to harm themselves. This addresses content that advocates for, or advises a person to engage in, self-harm, disordered eating or dying by suicide. In fact, over the past decade, depression has doubled among Canadians aged 15 to 24. Anxiety has quadrupled, and emergency room visits for self-harm among teenage girls has risen by 138% in my home province of Ontario.

The fifth defined harm is content that foments hatred. The definition of “hatred” abides by the Supreme Court's now widely accepted definition, as set out in R v. Keegstra. This content expresses extreme detestation or vilification on the basis of a protected characteristic under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The sixth category is content that incites violence and captures content that actively encourages real-world harm and pain. Violence and the threat of violence have spiked online, enabled by circulation and amplification. I am sure many of my colleagues have witnessed this themselves. It should be noted at this point that Bill C-34 would not newly criminalize this. Death threats are already illegal, as they should be in a free society. This inclusion in the bill would simply strengthen online platforms' obligations to address it and to remove it.

● (1145)

The seventh and final category is terrorism or violent extremism content. Here, the definition captures content that actively encourages, promotes, facilitates, offers training for or recruits for violent extremist or terrorist activity. Training, encouragement, operational assistance and recruitment play a role in international terrorism networks, festering and predating online.

In addition to the seven types of harmful content, the act tackles access to pornography, requiring covered services to ensure that pornographic content is not accessible to children. It would do so by requiring age verification or estimation measures to be used to prevent access to pornographic content.

The act also addresses an emerging technology with potential for significant harm: synthetic content. In the bill, synthetic content is defined as computer-generated content whose depiction is likely to be mistaken as authentic. This captures content like deepfakes and AI-generated materials that look real. Synthetic text is excluded from the scope of the bill. Only synthetic images, audio or video would be subject to the labelling requirement.

The safe social media act also addresses coordinated, inauthentic behaviour or bot campaigns. Under the duty to act responsibly, social media services would have to mitigate risks to exposure and label content from bot campaigns, combatting disinformation and foreign interference campaigns.

Bill C-34 would combat the most damaging types of harmful content online in a manner that aligns with other regimes and other jurisdictions. The safe social media act is in line with our government's commitment to supporting victims of crime, as well as the protection of Canadians online, while respecting rights, institutional roles and the realities of today's online world.

● (1150)

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in different parts of her speech, the member described some online harms that are criminal acts. As she said, they do not require changes in law. There is harmful content online that involves terrorism, fomenting hatred, threats and death threats, and these kinds of things are already serious crimes. When a serious crime is committed, a person should be sent straight to the police and prosecuted.

The Liberals would make this commission a separate new structure, but should we not have more efficient enforcement of our existing laws?

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the increase in these types of situations has been severe over the last 10 to 12 years, with more people in these online spaces and the changes that have happened to social media. This bill would augment the work of law enforcement. It would not hinder it. It would help support the work they are doing.

Giving this commission a clear threshold and removing this type of harmful content online would, as I mentioned in my speech, help victims not be revictimized while the police are doing investigations and the work they need to do when criminal thresholds have been met and criminal charges can be laid. This would complement the work of law enforcement, and they welcome this change.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would love to hear my colleague's perspective.

I do have one concern. In the past, I have seen the government back down on things like the digital services tax and the levies so as not to upset the tech giants, which have privileged access to President Trump. We know that legislation like this can be unpopular with big tech. Lawsuits have been brought against such measures in the United States.

Is my colleague sure that the government will not back down if the U.S. government decides to exert pressure to block this kind of legislation?

[*English*]

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, I think people can see our commitment just by looking at Bill C-22, which is currently in the other place. It took over a year of debating that bill in the House of Commons to finally get it through committee and get it passed, without the support of opposition parties. That bill is going to be crucial in helping to solve a lot of cases and going up against the big tech companies, which can preserve the information needed in an online space when harm is done to someone. Take sextortion as an example. Many children have lost their lives over sextortion in our country. Those cases could be prevented and solved quicker, and people could be held accountable.

All the pieces of legislation that we are putting forward are for making sure that these companies are better regulated and are accountable and that the person who does the harm is charged and convicted.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to personally express my appreciation for and thanks to the secretary of state. She has been leading the fight here, with a number of legislative initiatives to make our communities safer, on behalf of the Prime Minister and the entire government caucus, working with a couple of other ministers. I believe she is right when she says that this is a very important aspect of protecting the children of Canada, and it complements many other initiatives.

This Parliament has brought forward a historic number of pieces of legislation to make our communities safer, and I want to express my appreciation, as I know many of my constituents do, for what she has been able to accomplish.

● (1155)

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, to my colleague, who has done a lot of heavy lifting in debating these issues in the House, I appreciate the feedback on these important bills.

He is right. They are all complementary. We need to put all of these things together so we can combat this type of activity and protect our children better.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-34.

We have heard a great deal of anecdotal evidence this morning, and I believe all my colleagues would agree that something along the lines of a precautionary principle is warranted. In risk management, we are often faced with uncertainty about the economic or social consequences of taking political action. However, uncertainty must not keep us from taking action. In this case, I believe we are dealing with an issue that calls for the application of the precautionary principle.

Like all my colleagues, I am familiar with the many concerns surrounding digital platforms and social media, whether it be Facebook, TikTok, harmful influencer content, the spread of misogyny or the rise of toxic masculinity. I do not intend to revisit all of those issues today. I believe my colleagues have already painted a compelling picture this morning. These are challenges we are all aware of, and for those of us who have children in our lives, they are concerns we all share.

As we consider this bill, I want to steer the conversation to something else, the thorny issue that the Liberal government often tries to sidestep, namely, the autonomy and the cultural distinctiveness of the Quebec nation. There is no getting around this issue in the context of this bill. However, I want to be clear from the outset: The Bloc Québécois is convinced that we need to take action urgently to hold web giants to account and protect young people from online harm. My colleagues have made that very clear in their speeches.

If members look at the Constitution, they will see, as I do, that because the federal government has jurisdiction over telecommunications, it has a responsibility and a duty to implement modern regulations that are commensurate with the problem. However, it must be said this issue has many facets and some of those facets fall under areas of provincial jurisdiction. For example, Bill C-34 has an education component when it comes to what public authorities need to do to support young people in the digital world, yet that cannot fall under federal jurisdiction. In my view, that alone is enough to call on the federal government not to act alone on Bill C-34.

What has the Liberal government done so far after asking public servants to draft Bill C-34? Unfortunately, it has decided to act alone.

The government actually already had guidelines for addressing this kind of problem. In particular, there was the report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, which warned the government about the effects of influencers and social media on children and teens. The committee recommended:

> That the Government of Canada, in addressing the effects of influencers and social media on children and adolescents—and while recognizing the jurisdiction and primacy of the provinces in matters relating to social services and youth protection—adopt an asymmetrical and flexible approach.

Had the government followed the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, we should have seen an asymmetrical and flexible approach in Bill C-34. This raises a fairly straightforward question. Does Bill C-34 respect the jurisdiction and primacy of the provinces in matters relating to social services and youth protection? Does the bill adopt an asymmetrical and flexible approach that takes Quebec's specific circumstances into account?

We will have the opportunity to examine that in committee, but at this stage, the answer appears to be no. That raises another question. In drafting Bill C-34, did the federal government consult with Quebec and the provinces to seek their views on the issue at hand and on the best ways to address it? To my knowledge, once again, the answer appears to be no.

● (1200)

Next, we would need to determine whether the mechanisms provided for in Bill C-34 apply a principle of asymmetry. This seems essential to me in the Canadian context, where there are 10 provinces. Actually, Quebec is not really a province, since it is a nation. Such a principle would allow a territory, for example, Quebec, to develop its own response and solutions to the problem. Upon reading Bill C-34, it appears that no such provision for asymmetry exists. However, it is clear that the democratic will of Quebec and the provinces may differ from the solutions ultimately adopted by the federal government. This possibility is all the more likely given that Quebec, again, is not a province like any other, but rather a nation with a certain degree of political autonomy and distinct cultural characteristics.

As I mentioned in my introduction, the Bloc Québécois is not necessarily opposed to the solutions presented in the bill, although we do prefer educational measures and tools, a preference that, incidentally, is perfectly compatible with our other preference for decisions and policies made and adopted by the National Assembly of Quebec, which has sole jurisdiction over education.

This brings up another issue that I think is fundamental. In our society, which level of government is ultimately responsible for protecting youth in Quebec, creating social conditions that are conducive to their development and ensuring that they have a better future? The answer is very clearly the Quebec government. Logically, major social debates affecting Quebec youth are discussed within Quebec's own democratic processes and result from decisions made by the Quebec government, which are carried over into Quebec laws. These laws are passed in the only parliament with the standing to make decisions for the future of Quebec society as a whole: the Quebec National Assembly.

Issues affecting Quebec youth will not be decided in this Parliament. Ottawa will not be the one to decide how we can protect Quebec youth in the context of digital platforms. Quebeckers will want to discuss, debate and agree on the best way forward. Canadians will rightly hold those discussions too, but they will be two separate discussions held by two distinct nations. In this case, Quebec's cultural distinctiveness must be taken into consideration, as well as our desire for greater political autonomy. Quebec may want to restrict access to social media to children and teenagers, or it may find another solution that works for it.

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage wisely recommended that the government understand and respect this reality. Unfortunately, it appears that the Liberal government has not seen the wisdom of heeding the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

The Bloc Québécois will fully co-operate with members of all political parties in discussing aspects of the issue that fall solely under federal jurisdiction and in studying and exploring the best ways to hold big tech to account and force tech companies to adopt more responsible practices. I must emphasize, however, that the Bloc Québécois will defend Quebec's jurisdiction over youth and education and will assert the primacy of Quebec's democratic conversation and its superior authority in shaping the most important societal debates. Nothing is more important than young people and their future, but any decision on the matter falls within the purview of the Quebec nation.

● (1205)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some aspects of my colleague's speech were clear, but others were not.

One thing he made clear is that the Government of Canada has both the jurisdiction and the responsibility to protect our young people when it comes to social media. Less clear were his suggestions that the Canadian government could prevent the Government of Quebec from doing the same.

How does the fact that the Canadian government is providing strong leadership to protect our children prevent the Government of Quebec from implementing its own measures to protect our young people, if it chooses to do so?

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, one thing that has been extensively documented in Canadian political history is recurrence of predatory federalism, when the federal government chooses to make decisions in areas outside its jurisdiction.

All I was trying to point out to my colleague is that, on closer examination of the bill, we see that it definitely includes aspects related to education and our cultural distinctiveness. The Quebec government is best placed to address these imperatives.

I completely understand that residual powers give the federal government the ability to legislate on matters related to telecommunications, but we should not overlook the essential fact that Quebec also has the ability to legislate in its its areas of jurisdiction. We are asking the federal government to take that into consideration.

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to circle back to the consultations with Quebec. At the same time, he could say a few words about the government's co-operation on this bill in committee.

Does he expect there will be co-operation, or will the majority make a decision against the opposition?

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the federal government appears to have made no attempt thus far to engage in discussions with the provinces and Quebec. That is regrettable.

As we have seen recently, the federal government's decisions suggest that it is much more interested in working with some of the other provinces than with Quebec. It wants to have a lot to do with to Alberta, but, as evidenced by its handling of the Canada-Europe summit, it wants less to do with Quebec. Time will tell if I am right or wrong, but that is my impression based on what has taken place over the past few days.

After all, it takes two to tango, but if one partner is silenced, that makes things difficult.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's contribution to this debate. He and I are committed sovereignists. We will always feel constrained within Canada. We believe that only independence will allow Quebeckers to express themselves fully and to develop public policies that truly reflect their values and priorities.

Now, we can see that, before drafting Bill C-34, the government completely ignored the work that had already been done in Quebec, particularly by the special committee tasked with studying the impact of screens and social media on youth health and development, as well as the possible solutions already being discussed within Quebec in an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, namely youth protection and social policy.

Does my colleague not feel a little sorry for our federalist friends today, as they try to convince us that there will always be a place and a listening ear for Quebec within Canada?

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I always feel sorry for my federalist colleagues when they fall for the line that Ottawa knows best what is good for them. I also feel sorry for my colleagues who fail to see that, economically speaking, Quebec is the one most affected by the tariffs, while Ottawa continues to invest billions of dollars in the oil industry, which is not affected by the tariffs and whose revenues go directly to the United States.

Still, I am optimistic because anyone can see the light someday. I am confident that members like my colleague, the member for Québec Centre, will see the light one day and build the country of Quebec with us.

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act. I will be talking about young people, concerned parents and women who are victims of violence online.

Social media is part of our lives. It helps us stay connected and keep up with the news. For young people, it is also where friendships are formed and where they try to find their place. I am not saying social media is bad. It has many positive aspects. We also know there are risks, and these risks can sometimes have very serious consequences. A young person can be humiliated in front of their entire school. An intimate photo can be shared without their consent. A child can gain access to content that encourages them to harm themselves.

The consequences do not just disappear when we turn off our phones. They follow us to school and home, and sometimes they even keep us awake at night. In Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, and everywhere else in the country, families want their children to be safe. That is only natural. That is why we must take action.

A lot of demands are placed on parents today. They have to set limits, understand constantly changing applications and talk about new dangers. Of course, parents play a vital role. No one is saying otherwise. However, we have to be realistic: Parents cannot look at every video and comment. They cannot predict what a platform is going to offer their child the next day.

Businesses know how their platforms work. They pick the tools provided and the content recommended. They have to accept their share of responsibility too. Leaving families and victims to fend for themselves is not normal.

I would now like to move on to something near and dear to my heart: the protection of women, children and girls. Take a simple example. A young woman shares an intimate photo with someone she trusts. Later on, that photo is sent on to others without her consent. This is a violation of her privacy, even if it follows an argument or separation. Consent matters. Giving someone a photo never amounts to agreeing that it be shown to everyone else.

Today, there is another problem to contend with. Artificial intelligence makes it possible to create a fake intimate image. A person's face can be used to create a photo that was never actually taken. This is called deepfaking. Even if the image is fake, the shame, fear and consequences can be very real.

Imagine a teenage girl returning to class the next day, or a woman seeing this image circulating at work. No one should have to go through that. Bill C-34 provides for a swift response to certain types of very serious content. This includes intimate images shared without consent, including sexualized deepfakes. It also includes content related to the sexual exploitation of children.

For both of these categories, the bill stipulates that the content must be made inaccessible in Canada within 24 hours of being detected or reported. It also provides a process for appealing the decision. The reason it is so important to be so swift is that an image can cause enormous damage in just a few hours, and the victim should not have to take it upon themselves to remove every copy of that image.

We also need to better protect children before problems arise. Today, many young people spend time on platforms that were designed to keep their attention. One video leads to another, then another and another. Even adults sometimes have a hard time stopping, so imagine what this must be like for a child. The bill would require the services in question to look at the risks their platform presents and do what is needed to mitigate those risks.

I am thinking of cyber-bullying, attempts at sexual exploitation and content that encourages young people to harm themselves. Children's safety must be taken into account when the platform is designed. It must not depend solely on a child's ability to find the right button to ask for help.

The bill proposes a rule for some social media platforms. Young people under the age of 16 would not be allowed to have an account. However, I want to clarify. This does not mean that the bill bans all digital tools for all young people. A service can get an exception if they demonstrate that they meet the child protection requirements. This is worth considering. Young people need to talk to their friends. Their personal information needs to be protected and their age needs to be verified. Those are important issues. We need to carefully examine them in committee.

● (1210)

To put it simply, if a company wants young users on its platform, it must be able to demonstrate that it is protecting them.

We also need to talk about artificial intelligence. Chatbots respond around the clock. They can make people feel like someone is listening, but a digital tool will never replace a loved one, nor can it replace a professional when a person is in distress. Bill C-34 introduces measures to reduce the risks associated with these services. For example, when a user expresses suicidal thoughts or says they want to harm themselves, the service would be required to direct them to appropriate help. This is an important safeguard, especially for young people and vulnerable individuals.

Drafting good regulations is one thing; ensuring compliance is another. The bill would create an independent digital safety commission of Canada tasked with overseeing compliance with the regulations. Platforms would be required to explain the risks and the measures taken to reduce those risks. Financial penalties may apply in cases of non-compliance. When a company's decisions affect the safety of millions of people, it must be held accountable.

I would also like to say a few words about freedom of expression and privacy. These rights are essential. Protecting young people and victims does not mean silencing those who hold different opinions. The bill targets specific categories of harmful content. Private messaging does not fall within its scope. We must remain vigilant about the way in which users' ages will be verified. The committee's study will provide an opportunity to hear from parents, young people, experts, and organizations that defend the rights of Canadians. We have to get this right.

No law can prevent all problems on the Internet. Parents and schools will always have a role to play. That said, we can do better. We can ask platforms to prevent risks and respond quickly when someone experiences online abuse. I am thinking of the families in Boisbriand, Saint-Eustache, Rosemère, and Deux-Montagnes. They want the same thing as all Canadian families: for their children to grow up and learn in safety. I am also thinking of the women and girls who simply want to live, work and express themselves without fear of being humiliated and intimidated online. For their sake, we must move forward. That is why I support Bill C-34 and am in favour of referring it to committee, where we will have the opportunity to review it, ask the right questions and improve it if necessary.

● (1215)

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for her speech on this important bill. When the committee considered this matter, it adopted the following recommendation

> That the Government of Canada, in addressing the effects of influencers and social media on children and adolescents—and while recognizing the jurisdiction and primacy of the provinces in matters relating to social services and youth protection—adopt an asymmetrical and flexible approach.

Does my colleague feel that the government has adopted a sufficiently asymmetrical and flexible approach with this bill in order to recognize provincial jurisdiction and precedence in social policy and youth protection? Has it sufficiently consulted Quebec and the provinces on this matter, particularly with regard to youth protection and the various social issues?

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, we must respect provincial and federal areas of jurisdiction. We must also ensure that we work together. We must ensure that all MPs from Quebec, who represent Quebec, respect one another and ensure that they represent their constituents effectively. Governments at all levels, whether provincial or federal, must work in partnership to make meaningful progress. Bill C-34 specifically helps to ensure that the young people using these platforms are safe.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, whom I hold in high regard, for her speech. As legislators, we have a responsibility to adapt to the issues of the day. As we know, kids today do not face the same threats as kids from previous generations. Virtual spaces and social media are ubiquitous, and AI use is on the rise.

What are my colleague's thoughts on our responsibility as parliamentarians to acknowledge these technological changes? How can we ensure that the legislative framework keeps pace with these changes?

● (1220)

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, laws often lag behind a changing society . Twenty years ago, we did not have to deal with social media, but now we need to create new laws to regulate it.

We need to make sure that our young people are able to surf the Internet safely and that any non-consensual images are taken down. We have to make sure of that. These things did not exist 20 or 30 years ago. The bill will help us to regulate this phenomenon. I am deeply troubled to know that deepfakes and images that young people did not consent to share are being posted on social media. This causes enormous harm to these young people and these women.

The bill will be sent to committee. We will hear from experts and we will move forward.

I am sure that we will find a solution that everyone can agree on.

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we agree that children are being harmed, and parents, I know, are desperate for a solution. Tech giants have operated without accountability for far too long, and it is important that we hold big tech accountable. Would this bill do that?

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that we respond appropriately through legislation.

Bill C-34 will address certain issues, such as ensuring that social media platforms implement programs to protect young people. That said, Bill C-22 is also important because it serves as the foundation for all of this. That bill is currently before the Senate and it must be passed.

The same is true for Bill C-34, which will ensure that we continue to regulate big tech.

[*English*]

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act, on behalf of the constituents of Richmond Hill South.

Children need real protection online and parents need confidence that the services their children use are designed with their safety in mind. Children are being harmed, families are looking for answers and technology companies have too often left parents to manage risks that those companies are sometimes better positioned to address.

Holding social media platforms accountable should be a shared commitment across the House, but would Bill C-34 deliver that accountability? If it is passed, how will we know whether it is working? Would success mean fewer children experiencing exploitation, harassment and harmful interactions, or would it mean that platforms have filed the required plans and completed the necessary paperwork? Those are different outcomes, and Parliament should be clear about which one matters.

As lawmakers, we should examine its proposals seriously. At the same time, supporting the objective does not relieve us of the responsibility to scrutinize the approach.

The bill shares important features with and seems to draw inspiration from the European Union's model of platform regulation, including risk management obligations, transparency requirements and an oversight regulator. That comparison is particularly timely because the Canada-European Union summit begins today in Montreal, with digital co-operation among the subjects on its published agenda.

What does the government intend that co-operation to include? Will it involve research, enforcement, co-operation and sharing evidence, or could it involve commitments to align Canadian legislation with European rules made overseas? Will we be ceding our authority in this Canadian Parliament to the European Parliament? Will the Canadian government retain our own regulatory authority in respect of Canadians, or will co-operation yield jurisdiction to European regulators?

The EU's proposed kids act provides an interesting comparison. It proposes independent accounts from age 15 and up, with supervised restricted accounts for 13- and 14-year-olds and a ban on access for children under the age of 13. Bill C-34 proposes an under the age of 16 account restriction for specified services. The Europeans have chosen to go with a different age threshold and a phased approach. The EU's proposed kids act is also far more broad in scope, covering app stores, operating systems and gaming platforms, which are not contemplated in Bill C-34.

Canadians should know whether their government is contemplating any commitment to follow the European proposal and how it intends to preserve the Canadian Parliament's ability to make decisions suited to Canadian circumstances. Will Parliament see the terms of any proposed alignment, and will Canadian families have a meaningful opportunity to explain how those choices would affect them?

That brings me to the implementation. The bill would require protective design features, but important details would be established through regulations by unelected government officials rather than legislation made by elected lawmakers. What would that mean for recommendation feeds and that repeatedly direct children toward disturbing material? What would it mean for autoplay, persistent notifications or design choices that encourage young people to remain online long after they intended to leave? How much of the practical protection would Canadians understand when Parliament votes, and how much would become clear only after regulations by this new digital safety commission are developed at a future date?

There can be reasons to leave technical details to regulations, particularly when technology changes quickly, but elected representatives should still understand the specifics of the framework they are being asked to approve. What measurable outcomes would the government publish and what would trigger a change in approach if the evidence shows that children remain exposed to the same harms and that the unelected regulators and this new digital safety commission are failing to meet the stated legislative objectives?

We should examine the proposed account restriction with the same seriousness. If teenagers lose access to familiar platforms, where would they go? Could some move to smaller services with weaker safeguards, less moderation and fewer opportunities for parents to understand what is happening? That is a risk to investigate rather than an outcome we should assume, but surely an implementation plan must consider what would happen after an account is blocked.

Australia's early experience illustrates why evaluation matters. Its online safety regulator reported that 70% of children under 16 who had accounts before the restriction were able to retain them or create new ones at the three-month mark, while also reporting that harm complaint did not decline at all.

What lessons has the government drawn from that experience? What would Canada do differently where enforcement has proved difficult? How would platforms deal with false ages, borrowed accounts or attempts to evade location checks, including through VPNs? Would those efforts produce effective protection or repeated demands for more information from everyone using the service?

Parents know their children in ways that politicians and regulators cannot and will not, so how would this framework give families practical tools while ensuring that companies retain responsibility for the risks they may have helped expose children to?

● (1225)

The scope of the legislation also deserves careful examination. The bill provides for user thresholds established through regulations but it also allows particular, smaller social media services to be designated where significant risks exist. It contains a mechanism for bringing additional categories of online services into the framework. The question, therefore, is how effectively those powers would be used when children's behaviour changes. Would elected members in the Parliament get a say? Would this inadvertently create uncertainty for industry? How quickly could government respond if young people migrated to a smaller service that fell below the general threshold but presented comparable dangers? We should also ask how interactive gaming environments would be assessed, as opposed to just conventional social media feeds.

When a service combines gaming, public interaction, private communication and user-generated content, which features of the service would determine its treatment and how would parents know which protections apply?

Those implementation questions become even more important when we consider privacy. Age assurance and verification call into question whether it would require every Canadian to upload a driver's licence or photo identification and what sorts of technologies would be used in the process of verification and storage. The legislation would, however, contemplate age verification or estimation, which raises practical questions about what information would be collected, who would handle it and how compliance would be checked.

The bill includes safeguards restricting the use of that information, requiring its protection and providing for its destruction once the age check is complete, but how exactly to ensure that? Those requirements matter but parents will reasonably ask how they would be enforced across contractors, verification vendors, backup systems and the data retention laws of other jurisdictions. What evidence would establish that information has been deleted? How would failures be detected and what remedy would a family have if sensitive information was exposed before the regulator discovered that something had gone wrong?

No government can honestly promise that a data breach will never occur, which makes it essential to minimize collection and demonstrate why any information being requested is necessary.

The governance of the new commission deserves an equally careful examination, particularly because rule-making, investigation, enforcement and decision-making functions place substantial authority within the same institution. The bill would assign substantial powers to cabinet and the commission rather than to Parliament. The new commissioner would serve as a sort of superregulator that will wield serious power by acting as a rule-maker, investigator, enforcer, prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner all at the same time.

When Parliament delegates consequential choices about the boundaries of an online safety regime, Canadians should be able to understand who makes those choices, what evidence supports them and how an error can be challenged. Would the opportunities to make representations, the reporting requirements and the available avenues of review be sufficient to provide meaningful accountability, especially for an individual or smaller business without extensive legal resources? How would Parliament assess whether the commission was exercising its authority proportionately and what information would allow members to distinguish effective protection from administrative activity?

Freedom of expression must remain part of that assessment. Bill C-34 leaves the definition of regulated social media services to future regulations by unelected government officials. It defines some categories of harmful content but those definitions still require further interpretation and platforms still make decisions about individual posts in circumstances where context can be difficult for automated systems to understand. How would it distinguish the discussion of self-harm intended to help a young person from material encouraging it or distinguish reporting on hateful conduct from endorsing that conduct? How would the threshold of harmful content be determined and how would it be applied?

The maximum administrative monetary penalty is the greater of $10 million and 3% of global revenue. Could the penalty create an incentive to encourage excessive restriction of lawful, educational, artistic or political expression? How would the government measure and correct that possibility? Would it inadvertently stifle freedom of expression and the creation of new services?

Related legislation elsewhere has faced constitutional challenges just south of the border, including state-level laws on social media age verification and bans, with various provisions from at least half a dozen jurisdictions being suspended or subject to judicial scrutiny. The question is how the Canadian charter would apply to Bill CC-34. What has the government learned from those disputes in other jurisdictions? How has that analysis informed provisions intended to provide durable protection rather than years of uncertainty and litigation? These questions come from taking the objective seriously.

Families deserve protection that works. Companies deserve clear obligations that can be held to. Canadians deserve confidence that privacy and lawful expression will receive meaningful protection throughout implementation. We should study Bill C-34 carefully and insist not on a mere compliance regime where success is measured by how much paperwork it produces but a framework where success is measured by safer children and accountable companies. That is the responsibility before the House.

● (1230)

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member had a lot of questions in his speech about details that should come forward. I wonder if he has any specific amendments he would like to see brought to committee.

Vincent Ho: Mr. Speaker, these are questions that Parliament should be asking and that parents are demanding answers to. Parents expect their children to be protected. They expect technology companies to be held accountable.

What Canadians do not want to see is a new online regime that creates more paperwork and more compliance, and where success is measured through mere compliance with those requirements, as we see in the case of Australia, where the effects have not been wildly positive. As a matter of fact, harm complaints are at the same levels as before the legislation was enacted.

These are serious questions that should be asked, questions that the government should be able to answer.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech.

I would like to hear his views on whether Bill C-34 is flexible enough to allow the provinces to apply their own rules, based on their own interests. I would draw a parallel with the drinking age. We know that Quebec forms a nation, but there are differences even between the provinces, as in the example I gave, where laws and age restrictions can vary from one province to the next.

Could the same apply to the issue we are talking about here, namely access to social media? Does Bill C-34 provide enough flexibility?

[*English*]

Vincent Ho: Mr. Speaker, the question the member brings up is about the issue of jurisdiction. That is a question that should be asked as well.

Jurisdiction is an issue that perhaps applies to laws that are made even outside of Canada. There may be laws from other countries that these social media platforms have to adhere to about data retention. For example, if there is a Canadian law that says that these companies have to retain the private information of individuals and that this Canadian law may require it to be destroyed, rightly so, after the purpose has been met, it might actually contravene another law of a different country.

These are questions that are worth asking and that the government needs to answer.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whenever my colleague gives a speech in this House, it is very dense and full of facts.

With his legal background, I would like to ask him about something that is very important. He mentioned two things: one was implementation and one was definitions. We cannot get into the implementation until we have strict definitions. He said that the defining features of this legislation would be in regulations that are to come from unelected bureaucrats. Could he maybe expand on that and on the dangers of that?

● (1235)

Vincent Ho: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the alarming features of the government. It tends to trust unelected bureaucrats, and its members tend to defend those decisions. They tend to forget that they are elected by the people. They are elected by Canadians to work for Canadians, to listen to Canadians, to express the concerns of Canadians and, in this case, to listen to parents and protect the interests of children. Parliament is right to be able to ask those questions rather than ceding our decision-making authority to unelected regulators that these Liberals love to defend.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member said that success should not be measured by mere compliance. Well, if these companies comply with this bill, I believe we can say that is success because they would have a duty to act responsibly, a duty to protect children and a duty to make certain contact inaccessible.

Would the member agree that that would be success?

Vincent Ho: Mr. Speaker, that Liberal member clearly has not heard the entire speech, because what I said was "mere compliance should not be the measure of success." It is the outcomes that we need to measure. We can see that in the Australian context where they have a lot of compliance but not a lot of results.

That seems to be a theme that the Liberal government likes to follow. It wants to announce and announce, comply and comply, and create these legislative frameworks with no results to show for them.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a very important bill aimed at protecting our children. I have no children of my own, but I am an uncle and a godfather. I know these children will grow up in a world that is quite different from the one I grew up in, even though I am not that old. The digital world has become omnipresent in our lives and in the lives of young people. Obviously, social media is everywhere, and artificial intelligence is on the rise. This opens up a number of possibilities. These new technologies can be very useful to young people, but they also come with risks, new threats and new dangers that previous generations may not have had to deal with in the same way.

As a legislator, I think it is important to pay attention to these changes and adapt our legislative framework to keep kids safe. For example, when parents send their kids to school, to activities run by community organizations or to other institutions, they expect their kids to be safe in those environments. The same should be true in the virtual spaces that are becoming increasingly ubiquitous in modern life. As a result, big tech and social media platforms should have certain obligations to keep kids safe online. Parents certainly have a role to play, but they cannot monitor their kids 24 hours a day. I believe that, as parliamentarians, we must give parents the tools they need and help them keep their kids safe online.

That is exactly what we are doing with Bill C-34. We are implementing an appropriate framework to protect children from being exposed to harmful content while using chatbots and social media. This bill is in keeping with the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, because one of the articles of that convention talks about measures that should be taken to protect children from material or information that could be injurious to their well-being. As members know, children can be exposed to a lot of such content online.

With Bill C-34, we are proposing a better regulatory framework governing how children under the age of 16 use social media. This is an important issue because, when we look at the data, it is clear that young people are experiencing mental health problems. A number of indicators are quite worrisome, all things considered. The excessive and addictive use of social media can have an impact on mental health. This has been documented. Research also shows that the adverse effects social media can have on mental health are even more pronounced among preteens and teens. We also know that there is harmful content out there that young people can be exposed to. We have a responsibility to protect young people from that kind of content.

Our approach with Bill C-34 is to ban people under the age of 16 from having accounts on platforms that have not proven that their services are safe. An important distinction needs to be made here. This is not an outright ban. We are not banning all social media for people under 16. We are preventing them from creating accounts on platforms that do not submit a safety plan. Bill C-34 sets out a specific procedure. Platforms that want to allow young people under 16 to create an account will have to apply to the new digital safety commission for an exemption and prove that their products are safe for children. They will have to show how they protect children from harmful content, like content that could incite violence or bullying, content that involves sexual exploitation or intimate images shared without consent, or content that could encourage young people to harm themselves or others. That kind of content should not be available to our youth online. Unfortunately, as they are currently designed, the algorithms sometimes expose young people to content like that much too early in life, and it can affect their mental health.

If the digital platforms want young people to have accounts, they will have to implement safety measures and revise their algorithms. I am no technology expert, but there are ways to prevent young people from being exposed to this type of content. The platforms will have to prove their measures work. If not, they will have to implement age verification. Several age verification tools are available. There are models in Australia and the United Kingdom. We did not identify a specific model in the bill because we know that technology evolves.

● (1240)

The model that is ultimately adopted will need to be approved by the new digital safety commission, which will bring together experts in the field. There must be a degree of flexibility in determining the most effective methods of verifying people's age online while also respecting their privacy.

This is an important point. Where age verification is required, there will also be obligations regarding privacy protection and the prompt deletion of supporting documents. In this way, the platforms can effectively verify age while also ensuring that this data is not retained, thereby protecting privacy.

We know that artificial intelligence is revolutionizing the world as we know it. It is therefore important to address the issue of our young people's safety when they use various AI-powered tools, particularly chatbots. The aim of Bill C-34 is to require certain safeguards to be built into these tools from the design stage onward. We are taking proactive measures through prevention.

When algorithms are used, how does the system work? How can we set guidelines to ensure that these services are safe for young people to use? These services must embed age-appropriate safeguards into the design and operation of their products. We have an obligation to act responsibly and to mitigate the risk of harmful behaviour that could be incited by these chatbots.

Here is a concrete example. Unfortunately, young people may experience mental health challenges. If somebody uses a chatbot to ask about self-harm or say they are contemplating suicide, certain mechanisms should be set in motion. There would be requirements in this respect. If a young person asks a chatbot a question about these types of issues, they would automatically be referred to the appropriate resources. There would also be measures in place if somebody talks about harming others.

In what context should the company that owns the chatbot refer a matter to the RCMP?

There will be clearer guidelines and procedures to ensure that these tools are safer to use. The chatbots will have to be transparent. Companies will also have to submit a safety plan to the commission. Simply making an effort will not be good enough. They will have to explain how they plan to implement these safety measures.

The bill also requires a faster process for removing harmful content. We know how harmful it can be for someone to have their intimate images shared without their consent. This also includes deepfakes. In the age of AI, it is possible to create images that appear very real, featuring someone's face, but that are in fact fake images depicting situations that are sometimes intimate.

The sharing of this kind of image is extremely harmful. Incidentally, we legislated on this issue by passing Bill C-16. Bill C-34 goes one step further. It imposes a duty on the platforms to quickly suppress this kind of content. If non-consensual intimate content is posted on online platforms or social media, the companies will have a duty to ensure that it is quickly taken down. If they do not, the digital safety commission will have the authority to levy fines. We need to take action and take this issue very seriously, because it has a real impact on the victims.

Lastly, Bill C-34 will also create the new digital safety commission of Canada. This commission will bring together experts in the field and report annually to Parliament. Its report will be submitted to the minister and tabled in Parliament to ensure accountability.

This commission and these experts will examine the digital safety plans prepared and published by social media platforms and chatbot services to verify whether they meet the required standards. Do they sufficiently meet the standards to allow people under the age of 16 to use them?

This commission will also help ensure transparency by requiring platforms to submit their safety plans to it. The commission will also be responsible for imposing fines. I think imposing fines is important because we need to ensure a certain level of accountability. If platforms fail to meet their obligations, there need to be real consequences. In the event of non-compliance, there could be a fine of up to 3% of global revenue, so these amounts could be very significant. This is essential.

● (1245)

[*English*]

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals brought forward this bill, and there are a lot of things resting on it, but the most important is definitions. I mentioned this to my colleague who gave a speech previously: How can we measure outcomes and how can we measure progress if we do not even have strict definitions with respect to what the bill is intended to do?

Can the member enlighten us about exactly what definitions the government is going for when it comes to social media platforms?

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, the bill sets out very clearly defined categories of harmful content. These include incitement to violence, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, incitement to bullying, and other forms. It is important to note that an independent digital safety commission will be established. Experts will serve on this commission. They will be able to examine what constitutes harmful content and explore ways to protect young people from exposure to such content. In terms of accountability, the commission will be required to submit an annual report to the minister, which will then be submitted to Parliament.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague and neighbour from Chaleur Bay for his substantive contribution to this debate.

My question for him is quite specific. In Quebec, the issue of young people's screen time has been studied extensively. A commission was set up. It held 30 meetings and spent 32 hours studying the matter, with 7,000 people responding to questionnaires and 2,500 Quebeckers providing feedback. One of the key outcomes of that work was recommendation 42, which states that social media accounts should be banned for youth under the age of 14. In Bill C-34, the ban is for youth 16 and under.

Why did the Liberals not bother to read the work that had already been done in Quebec and include those findings in their bill?

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, consultations were conducted across the country. In developing this bill, the government drew on scientific articles and studies. Consultations were held in Quebec, the Maritime provinces, western Canada and Ontario. A considerable amount of groundwork has gone into the preparation of this legislation. There will also be work carried out in committee, where we will be able to hear other perspectives.

I have heard several questions from the Bloc Québécois regarding jurisdiction. However, when it comes to these platforms, we are talking about regulating web giants and access to international digital platforms in Canada. This is a public safety matter. I believe that protecting young people on social media is just as important whether the young person lives in Charlo, on my side of Chaleur Bay, or in Bonaventure, on my colleague's side.

As the federal government, I believe we have a responsibility to act and to provide a national framework that helps ensure our young people are safe online, while, of course, listening carefully to what the provinces have to say.

● (1250)

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Madawaska—Restigouche gave a very eloquent speech about about Bill C-34.

I want to elaborate on what he said and talk about cellular connectivity, because my colleague and I face the same challenge with regard to cellular connectivity in the regions. That is an issue that we are working on together.

I would like him to talk about the importance of cellular connectivity in the regions, which will enable everyone to connect to social media.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, it is always a pleasure to work with her on this issue affecting our rural communities. Access to technology and online platforms depends on stable and reliable access to cellular networks.

I am pleased to co-sponsor her bill on cellular connectivity to give priority to underserviced regions in future tendering processes. I would say that this is also a critical issue because it is a matter of safety for our young people. We are talking here about protecting our young people. Most of them have cellphones these days, so they need access to reliable cellular networks. We are working together to see what can be done not only in terms of investments, but also in terms of federal regulations, to support technologies that would significantly improve cellular connectivity in our regions.

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour, of course, as always, to rise on behalf of my neighbours in Oshawa. Today I do so to speak about Bill C-34.

We know that social media has fundamentally changed how young Canadians communicate, how they learn and how they interact with one another. It has created opportunities for connection, education and creativity that previous generations, such as mine, could never even have imagined, but we know it has also introduced serious risks, particularly for children and teenagers, who are still developing the judgment and experience needed to navigate an increasingly complicated online environment.

It should be noted that when this legislation was first introduced, my daughter was still 15 years old. She is 16 now. I asked for her thoughts on whether we should we ban social media outright for children under age 16. She said that, yes, we could do that; it would not hurt. She said, though, that she did not have any struggles, because she knows I guided her through what she was supposed to do. This is a girl who asked me to put limits on her Instagram, so she may be a special case. Nonetheless, I think parenting is a big part of this.

Cyber-bullying, online exploitation, harmful content and the growing influence of artificial intelligence are no longer distant or hypothetical concerns, though. They are real challenges affecting Canadian families, and parents should not have to live in constant fear about what their children might encounter when they open an application on their phone.

Conservatives believe that children deserve to be protected, that parents deserve to have confidence in the platforms their families use and that technology companies, big tech, must be held accountable for the risks associated with their services. Those principles should and will guide our examination of Bill C-34. Protecting children also means getting the legislation right. It means ensuring that the measures Parliament adopts are effective, enforceable and consistent with the fundamental rights and freedoms Canadians expect their government to respect, because we know that good intentions alone do not make good legislation.

As the member of Parliament for Oshawa, I recently asked residents in my community to share their thoughts on Bill C-34 and the government's approach to protecting children online. The response revealed something important. Oshawa residents want children protected. There is no doubt about it, but they are deeply concerned about how we get there safely. When asked whether the federal government should ban children under the age of 16 from social media platforms, residents were actually almost evenly divided, with 48% supporting such a ban and 47% opposing it. This tells me there is no simple consensus on how government should approach this issue or how we should get there safely. Parents, grandparents, teachers and young people recognize the dangers of social media, but they also have legitimate questions about how far government intervention should go.

One father in Oshawa raising two teenagers near Lakeview Park wrote to me to express his desire for stronger protections against online predators. He also urged me to urge Parliament to ensure that responsible parents would not be subjected to unnecessary government surveillance simply for supervising their children's Internet use. A teacher in Oshawa similarly emphasized the harm that online platforms can cause young students, while raising concerns about age verification systems that could require families to surrender potentially sensitive personal information. These are all reasonable concerns, and they deserve to be taken seriously. We must ensure that efforts to protect children do not inadvertently create new risks for their own privacy and personal information.

Bill C-34 proposes several measures that are intended to address online harms. It would establish new responsibilities for regulated social media platforms, including requirements to reduce exposure to harmful content, provide users with tools to report material, and introduce additional protections for our children. It would also address artificial intelligence chatbot services and establish mechanisms for dealing with intimate images shared without consent and material involving the sexual victimization of children.

These are serious issues, and they absolutely deserve serious consideration. No child should have to experience online sexual exploitation. No parent should have to fight an endless battle to have exploitive material involving their child removed from the internet. No tech company should be permitted to simply look the other way when serious harm is occurring on its platform.

● (1255)

We must ask whether the proposed measures would actually make children safer or whether they would simply create another layer of bureaucracy without delivering the protections that Canadian families are truly asking for and, frankly, need. This brings me to one of the most significant questions surrounding Bill C-34.

The legislation proposes establishing a new digital safety commission of Canada with extensive regulatory and enforcement powers. While Conservatives recognize the importance of holding online platforms accountable, we have to also recognize that the powers Parliament grants to any government body must be accompanied by appropriate safeguards. Under Bill C-34, the proposed commission would have significant authority to establish certain requirements, investigate compliance, conduct hearings, issue orders and administer financial penalties. These would be substantial responsibilities for the proposed commission. Indeed, they would combine powers that in other contexts are often exercised by separate institutions.

This raises an important question: Who would hold the regulator accountable? It is not simply a hypothetical question raised by members of the opposition. It is a concern being expressed by Canadians. In my recent Oshawa survey, 64% of the people who answered the question about the proposed commission said they were worried about powers being potentially excessive and the risk of creating an unaccountable Internet regulator. We have lots of questions. Only 21% of people selected the response favouring the powerful government watchdog to hold large technology companies accountable. This should give every member of the House reason to want to examine these provisions very carefully and make sure that we get it right. Canadians are not simply asking whether the government intends to protect children. They are asking whether the government can be trusted to exercise the powers responsibly.

There are several provisions in the legislation that deserve much closer examination. Subclause 74(1), for example, provides that the commission would not be bound by the legal or technical rules of evidence when exercising certain powers under the act. Subclause 75(1) would permit the commission to conduct hearings in private in specific circumstances, and under the transitional provisions in part 2, clause 23, a single chairperson could temporarily exercise the powers of the commission before other members are appointed. We do have to watch for and and ask for some safeguards. Taken together, these proposed provisions raise legitimate questions on the concentration of regulatory authority and the safeguards that would govern its exercise.

To be clear, the issue is not whether online platforms should be held accountable. They absolutely should be. The issue is whether the government has struck the appropriate balance in this legislation between effective enforcement and the checks and balances essential in a free and democratic society. A regulator responsible for overseeing powerful technology companies must be subject to meaningful oversight. There must, I feel, be clear standards for decision-making, appropriate procedural protections and effective opportunities to challenge decisions. Canadians should not have to choose between protecting their children and their freedoms. We are capable of doing both, and I hope that we can come to a legislation that makes both possible.

We should be asking the question of whether Bill C-34 would give parents the practical tools they need to protect their children. Would it make it easier for families to understand? Conservatives want legislation with real teeth and a clear, effective enforcement mechanism, but those enforcement powers must be proportionate, transparent and accountable. We need to hear from parents, victims, survivors, privacy advocates, legal experts and people with technical expertise. We need to examine the proposed commission's powers, the safeguards governing its decisions, and the mechanisms available to ensure accountability. Above all, we need to ensure that the legislation would remain focused on delivering meaningful protections for Canadian children. Those are the principles that should guide our examination of Bill C-34.

Canadians deserve effective protections, they deserve clear answers, and above all, they deserve legislation that gets the balance right.

● (1300)

Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it has actually been quite a productive debate this morning on this very important piece of legislation. It is obviously an issue of public policy, but I think, for many of us, it is also a personal issue. I have young children. They are nine years and six years old, so they are still too young to be in the online world, which is a positive thing, but of course all of us as parents, uncles, aunts or whatever the case might be, want to make sure children are protected.

I think the member raises some interesting points. Is it her intention and the intention of the Conservative Party to support this legislation at second reading so it can move to committee and get the detailed study that I think we all agree it deserves?

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, as the member has children aged nine and six, I commend him that they are not on online platforms already, because it is a difficult task as a parent to make sure their kids are protected in that way.

I would say that Conservatives, on the whole, want to make sure the balance is struck. That means the bill has to be studied in committee and be examined very closely. We want to make sure kids are protected, but we need to get the balance right.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her contribution to the debate.

I want to hear her thoughts about the issue of federalism, respect for areas of jurisdiction and the co-operation that should normally exist within any self-respecting federation. In terms of protecting children, which is an objective we all share, Quebec has already created a special committee and completed a rigorous study to determine what actions can be taken, particularly with regard to banning social media for children.

Still, we notice that the government drafted Bill C-34 without considering the provinces and without thoroughly and adequately consulting the Government of Quebec.

What does my colleague think about the government's failure to respect provincial jurisdiction in drafting Bill C-34?

[*English*]

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc is absolutely right. I do think that whenever the federal government seeks to undertake such substantial legislation as this, individual provinces should be consulted. They should be spoken to about what they already have in place and how a bill would impact their provincial legislation and how it would not.

The member brings up a good question. Hopefully we can get to the bottom of who exactly was consulted and have more in-depth discussions when we potentially take a look at the bill in committee.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt that we are all united in wanting our children to be protected from this really toxic and, for some, profitable, world that just does damage to Canadians.

I was struck, in Bill C-34, by clause 85, which says, "The purpose of a penalty [in this act] is to promote compliance with this Act and not to punish." The maximum penalty for one of these pirate companies from outside Canada would be $10 million. I do not think the minister would, for one minute, say we have capped the value of the life of a Canadian child at $10 million. However, I would like punishment to be a core incentive for these corporations to clean up their act and really feel the duty to protect Canadian children, punishment that could end in jail time for directors if they do not comply with the duty to protect Canadian children.

● (1305)

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, I am a Conservative, so I believe in things such as preventative measures to make criminals think before they commit a crime, which is why I believe in things such as the mandatory minimum penalties for gun crimes and for some sex crimes, which the Liberals took away.

In juxtaposition with this, yes, if someone has committed a horrific crime, the penalty should be great in order to prevent these things from happening to our kids in the first place.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear from the speech we just heard how important it is. We are talking about a serious public policy concern, and there is a need for better public policy, which is what the bill intends to put forward, but there are an awful lot of details needed.

Is the member satisfied that, for example, the things that would be left to regulation in the future have been adequately addressed so far?

Rhonda Kirkland: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of concerns about the unknowns, like what unknown capabilities and superpowers the commission would have. Those are things we definitely have to dig deeper into at committee.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure, a sense of responsibility and, above all, gratitude that I rise today to speak to Bill C-34.

To explain why this bill matters, I would like to begin with an image that is familiar to every parent in the House here in Ottawa.

It is 11 o'clock at night. The house is quiet. The lights are off, and yet, beneath our child's bedroom door, there is still a faint blue glow—a screen still lit, a thumb continuing to swipe, scrolling and scrolling and scrolling.

We believe our child is safe. They are at home, under our roof, only a few metres away from us, but in reality, at that hour, they could be anywhere, with anyone, facing all kinds of risks.

It is for that child that I rise today to support Bill C-34, the safe social media act. I have spent my professional life at the intersection of information technology and public safety. I taught in the field of technology, particularly artificial intelligence. I served on Montreal's city council for eight years and on the city's public safety commission. I also worked as an adviser to the Montreal police service. If I have learned anything, it is that behind every statistic is a face.

As we look at the numbers, let us think about the faces. According to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 52% of Canadian teens have received unwanted sexual images online and 44% say they have been pressured to share or send these types of images. That is one in two teens. Let us imagine a high school classroom. Every other row of students has experienced this.

In only one year, 2023, Canadian police recorded 19,516 incidents of online child sexual exploitation, a 59% increase over the previous year and a 500% increase over 2014. Among young people aged 15 to 24, in a single decade, depression has doubled and anxiety has quadrupled. In addition, young people who are victims of online harm are three times more likely to consider suicide. Yes, three times more likely to consider suicide. I am not just quoting statistics here. I am talking about our children, children in Montreal, Calgary, Rimouski, Ottawa and all across Canada. I am talking about all of our children, including my own.

For far too long, parents have been told to keep a closer eye on their children, set limits, check their phones, check their computers, and check their electronic devices and smart phones. Let us be honest, parents are already overwhelmed. We cannot ask them to monitor their children's digital lives 24 hours a day, seven days a week, especially when, on the other side of the screen, there are systems specifically designed by the world's top engineers, with input from sociologists and behavioural experts, to capture our children's attention and never let go: endless scrolling, autoplay, algorithms that learn what catches a child's attention and keep serving them more and more of it. Online harm does not stem solely from individual misbehaviour. It also stems from the way these systems and services are designed.

Let us talk about what is known as safety by design. This is a very important concept that Bill C-34 is set to implement, and one that has been emphasized quite a bit by our colleagues in the Conservative Party. I will come back to this later.

● (1310)

I would also really like for us to talk about AI, chatbots that talk to children, virtual companions that mimic friendship and even affection, that respond to young people at three o'clock in the morning when no one else is there for them and that sometimes give young people in distress the worst possible advice and answers. When a toy is dangerous, it is pulled from store shelves. When a car has a defect, it is recalled. When an infant car seat fails safety tests, it is never put on the market. Why then should social media platforms, where children spend hours and hours each day, be the only exception? These platforms had a chance to take action voluntarily. They did not do enough. Our laws have not kept pace. We have laws that punish after harm has been done, but we have almost nothing to prevent harm in the first place.

Bill C-34 changes all that. This bill is based on a simple idea: safety by design. I am going to list three duties that will help achieve that. First, there is the duty to protect children. We need age-appropriate safeguards built into the products. Companies need to mitigate addictive features, add warnings and provide safe search settings. I repeat: This is a duty that begins at the design stage. Second, there is the duty to act responsibly. Companies must identify and reduce risks, provide effective blocking and reporting tools, and label deepfakes and content created by AI. Canadians deserve to know what is real and what is not. Finally, there is the duty to make the most serious types of content inaccessible: child sexual abuse material and intimate images shared without consent. Once reported, such content must be removed within 24 hours. If the platform does nothing, the victim will no longer be alone. They can turn to the digital safety commission of Canada.

Chatbots need a crisis protocol. When a young person expresses an intention to harm themselves or others, the bot will no longer be able to simply continue the conversation. It will be required to refer the person to appropriate help. For social media, users will have to be at least 16 to open an account. However, the door is wide open for platforms to be granted an exemption if they can demonstrate that their service is safe for children. The message is simple: Platforms are welcome to seek an exemption if they can prove that their product is safe and truly reliable for users. I talked about it with my 14-year-old son. I told him that our government was planning on imposing a minimum age of 16 for the use of social media. It sparked quite a discussion, but my son eventually came around to the view that this objective was very noble, because protecting young people is so important.

All of this will be overseen by Canada's new digital safety commission, which will be independent and made up of three to five expert members. It will review the safety plans published by the platforms, handle complaints, support victims and have the power to impose fines of up to 3% of global revenues. I am hearing some concerns today. They are legitimate, and I want to address them frankly and clearly, but above all in a responsible manner.

With respect to freedom of expression, it is protected by the charter, and this bill does not restrict it. The bill covers seven categories of harmful content, each of which is deliberately narrowly defined. The bill does not cover debate, disagreement or criticism, even when expressed in the strongest possible terms. What is more, the commission will have no power to arrest anyone. With respect to privacy, private messaging is specifically excluded. Data collected for age verification purposes must be protected and then promptly destroyed. It can be used for only one purpose: to prevent harm.

This bill does not target what Canadians say. It focuses on how platforms are built. Seventy-seven per cent of the population wants us to take action, so that is what we are doing. Pediatricians want us to take action, and so does everyone else.

● (1315)

I will return to the image of the faint blue glow under the door. I do not long for a world without screens. That world is gone. Digital media offers a marvellous opportunity for our young people—if it is used right.

[*English*]

Amanpreet Gill (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-34 would allow young people back onto social media platforms once providers meet the guidelines that would be established by the commission, but we do not know yet what those guidelines would require or whether they would be good enough to keep young people safe. Too often, big tech companies and their lobbyists are given a seat at the table when these decisions are made. Can the member assure the House that these guidelines would be developed independently of big tech companies and their lobbyists, with the safety of young people as their priority?

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his highly relevant question. We need to bear in mind who is going to sit on this commission. It will not be politicians or decision-makers from the House of Commons, but experts who, obviously, care about our children's future.

My colleague talked about age. Let me say again that the minimum age for social media will be 16. That is what the bill provides. Let me also say again that the commission will be composed of experts.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his highly informative speech.

One of my concerns is that the digital platforms, social media, are multinational corporations that often seem prepared to flout the laws and regulations of the countries where they operate.

The Standing Committee on Industry and Technology conducted a study on fraud. We found that the platforms are slow to act on fraudulent advertising. They claim that they are doing everything they can, but even after fraudulent advertising is reported, it takes them days, if not weeks, to remove it. Once a bill like this is passed, does my hon. colleague believe that the digital platforms will cooperate, or might we still run into a few stumbling blocks?

● (1320)

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes. However, it is not just about cooperation. It is also an obligation, one that has to come with penalties. When obligations are imposed without accompanying penalties, then they are just a suggestion. That is not the intent of Bill C-34, quite the contrary. The bill aims to protect our children. Everyone knows as well as I do that protecting our children is essential. International companies will not stand in the way of the government's determination.

Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and the extraordinary work he does to serve his constituents.

I would ask my colleague to tell the House and the parents and young people in his riding why it is important for us to adopt Bill C-34. What will this do to better protect Canadians, especially young Canadians?

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who represents the riding neighbouring mine, for that great question.

It is very simple. As I mentioned, I have a 14-year-old son. We know full well that when a toy is dangerous, it is taken off the market and off of store shelves. My son spends most of his time in front of a screen. I think we need to address this issue much more seriously. I cannot ask parents in Bourassa and across Canada to monitor their children's online activities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is virtually impossible. However, the platforms have the means to do so, they have the algorithms to do so, and they must do just that.

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Mr. Speaker, children need real protection online. Is Bill C-34 the best solution? This method is not working in Australia.

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for asking her question in such elegant French. I appreciate it.

The unique thing about this bill is that it is a world first. It is a step forward, and I hope that everyone here will vote to support it. There are three aspects. Australia did not regulate all of the aspects I listed in my speech, including the issue of social media, AI and platforms, as well as safety by design.

[*English*]

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. It is always an honour to speak in the House of Commons, but on this occasion, it is a particular honour.

Before I begin, I want to recognize and honour the life of Attilio Sirianni, who passed away last month in Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. He leaves behind his children Ferro, Teresa, Mario, Gino, Maria and Raffelina. I extend my deepest condolences to Attilio's family. May perpetual light shine upon him.

Before I get into my speech, I want to recognize the life of Angelo Carusi, who recently passed away in Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. Those who are left to mourn him include his father Tino, who I have gotten to know through the Colombo Lodge, our local Italian cultural centre; his son Angelo; and his siblings Augie, Ed and Rina. May perpetual light shine upon him. I extend my deepest condolences to the Carusi family.

When I was young and growing up, I basically spent my time watching baseball. I was a huge Blue Jays fan. Because I was on the west coast, the Blue Jays games would start at 4:30 p.m. every day. I would come home from school and that is essentially what I did. I had a 286 computer that I would use for word processing. My dot matrix printer was always there and always ready to help me out. I used that all the way until I was in my third year of university. In 1999, I think I got a Windows-based computer. That tells members how old I am. At the end of the day, the computer was a tool for work. I had terrible handwriting, so I would often type out my things. My mom was a legal assistant and could type about 60 or 70 words a minute, so I would sometimes conscript her into typing out my work assignments, for which I thank her. Things were simply different.

For instance, I have a background as someone who has worked extensively to combat Internet luring, but the luring of children, back when I was a child, was all done face-to-face. When people wanted to meet one another, they took out classified ads. The young people would read these ads and make fun of them. That was essentially how people met. Let us face it, kids were not generally responding to these ads. Luring takes place when somebody deliberately targets a child and, through that, attempts to lure the child into a relationship. It is almost never initiated by the child. That is why it is called luring. This is an area that I devoted a fair amount of my time to. It is no wonder, when we think about how much time kids spend online.

The Internet has changed a lot of things, but in some ways I think it has made the predatory world even more predatory. The anonymity of the Internet is something else. I remember attending a workshop about luring and the difficulties for children. We were told about all these social media vehicles where people did not even have to enter their name or email address and they could instantly go into a chat room and start talking to people, or do something that essentially was a crime immediately without any oversight. For far too long, it has been my view that service providers and social media providers have looked the other way.

When people look at the stats, they see that a number of crimes have skyrocketed. That is one of the reasons why I put forward my bill, Bill C-291, in the last Parliament, which received royal assent. I did that with the former member of what is now Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies. The reason we put that bill forward to change the name of child pornography to child sexual abuse and exploitation material was to reflect the gravity of the offence.

● (1325)

If somebody were to look at a chart, what they would see for 2013 is this massive skyrocketing, probably by about 10 to 15 times, of the reporting of offences. That is not just because more predators were born in, say, 1993 or something, and the offences are now coming to fruition. The difference was a difference in reporting. For far too long, we saw organizations and providers essentially turning a blind eye, as in they knew that luring was happening and the Internet was an unsafe place, yet nothing was done.

In 2012, and I am proud to say this as a Conservative, the Conservative government imposed a positive obligation on service providers to report. People might ask what a positive obligation is. Most laws are negative obligations in criminal law or in traffic law. "Do not speed" is a negative obligation. Someone has to not do something. "Do not assault" is another example.

A positive obligation requires a person to do something. For instance, paying taxes is a positive obligation. This law imposed a positive obligation for service providers to report, and the numbers absolutely skyrocketed. It was not just that this was happening more; it was being detected more.

I recently went to the RCMP to meet with RCMP commissioner Duheme and deputy commissioner Larkin, as well as many others, many of whom are in the business of protecting children. I went with the member for Oxford. It was a great meeting. These are the unsung heroes, in my view, of our law enforcement community. The reason is that they deal with child sexual abuse and exploitation material, day in and day out. They do not get a reprieve. They are the ones who have to deal with it, so I want to give a shout-out to those people because they are not paid more to do this, yet they put their lives and mental health on the line so that others do not have to, as they protect our children.

This is all to say that this is a crucial area of law. The Internet, let us face it, is not a safe place. Where I would like to see things go and where I would actually challenge the government to go on this point is with respect to sentencing. We are talking about an Internet regulator, but so much of what concerns us in our discourse here in Bill C-34, what we are aiming to do, the pernicious and insidious harms, if we will, of kids being on the Internet, is actually already regulated by criminal law.

I think we should be looking at the sentencing. I will give an example. Internet luring began with a sentence of five years in jail, maximum. A maximum sentence is a sentence that can be imposed, but not must be imposed. It started at five years, and then it went to 10 years. As Conservatives, I am proud that we upped it to 14 years.

Bill C-299 is a private member's bill I tabled last Parliament. I believe sentencing should go to life in prison. I believe someone who offends against children for that offence, or for sexual interference, which is essentially the sexual assault of a child, because children cannot consent, should be liable to life. If someone touches a kid, they should see the inside of a jail cell. I have said it before and I will say it again: If I am ever in charge of making laws on the government side, I will not stop until sex offenders see the inside of a jail cell for a darn long time.

I know I am already running short on time just talking about this. It is an area of great passion for me. I really do think that we have to value the mental health of children. We really do. This is not something that I think only the Conservatives value or only the Liberals value. Let us be real. Everybody in here values the mental health of children. How we go about it is what we need to debate substantially. I would invite the government to consider thinking about the sentencing aspect.

Before I end, I want to reflect on the life of Iolanda Bartella, somebody from Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola who recently passed away. Iolanda leaves behind her sons Frank, Carmelo and Rob. I actually taught her granddaughter Kiely at law school in a class on sentencing, probably eight or nine years ago. Kiely is now a lawyer. I send my deepest condolences to the Bartella family. May perpetual light shine upon her.

● (1330)

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for speaking to Bill C-34. I always say crime is a non-partisan issue. My colleague and I sit together on the public safety committee and work together on so many bills that we passed last year.

In June, we worked on Bill C-22 in committee, which is on lawful access, and complementary legislation to Bill C-34. It would provide law enforcement agencies with additional tools to help solve these criminal issues and keep our children safe online.

With Bill C-34, our goal is to hold large social media companies accountable. Unfortunately, Bill C-22 was delayed by opposition members.

My question is as follows: Will my colleague and members of the opposition party commit to supporting Bill C-34's timely passage and ensuring that big tech companies will be kept accountable to keep our children safe?

[*Translation*]

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

[*English*]

I practise my French with the member once in a while, and I have enjoyed sitting with her on the public safety committee.

There is a lot to go through here, and I am not going to be able to get through it all, but one of the things I want to say about Bill C-22, and I talked about Internet luring, is that my life in my former career revolved around lawful access. It really did. We heard that the opposition delayed it. I will say that I do not know that the government made the best case for the bill. I think there were a lot of areas we really needed to address, but at the end of the day, crime is not an issue.

What I want to see is the best bill possible and, as parliamentarians, we should be endeavouring for the best bill possible. When people say we need speedy passage, no, we need proper passage and we need prudent passage. I will always scrutinize bills to get prudent bills.

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first off, I want to offer my condolences to the family and friends of the individual mentioned by my hon. colleague.

I would like to know if he looked at comparable provisions enacted in other countries, like European nations and Australia.

If so, are there any aspects that we should keep in mind during our study of Bill C-34, based on what is being done elsewhere?

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

I am not an expert on what other jurisdictions are doing. In one jurisdiction, as I was preparing for the speech, I came across something, I believe it may have been in Australia, that said that, once the law was enacted, not necessarily every account disappeared for a young person. I think that is something we have to contend with.

The other thing we have to contend with, even with age verification, is that AI might be smart, it might be "intelligent", but can it really differentiate between somebody that is 15, 16, 17 or 14? To me, those are the types of things we need to study a committee. We just heard about Bill C-22. I would invite the government not to rush through this. Let us hear from people from Australia, New Zealand and places like that, because it is important that we, as parliamentarians, hear everything on this bill.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the charter statement for this bill, the Department of Justice acknowledges that the bill engages freedom of expression under subsection 2(b) and equality rights under section 15, because it distinguishes on the basis of age, and, of course, privacy interests under section 8 because of the age verification.

I find it striking that the charter statement relies on future commission guidelines, future regulations and a number of things that have not been determined yet. I am just wondering if the member could comment on the work that needs to be done in committee to reassure Canadians in this way.

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has been a wonderful addition to our B.C. caucus and our federal caucus here in the 45th Parliament.

I have read a number of charter statements, and I am not always impressed. I would say that sometimes they are deficient. When we start talking about how the charter applies to things that no longer exist, I think that jeopardizes what the rule of law says should be unparalleled transparency. If we do not know what might be there in regulation, how can we say how the charter is going to apply?

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House. Today, I will be speaking about Bill C-34, but before I begin, I want to take a moment to honour the memory of Chief Warrant Officer Ron Nutt, from my riding, who served in the 1st Hussars for over 30 years and sadly passed away at age 67. Taken too soon, he was a quiet, gentle man, but a really intelligent, forceful human being. He will be sorely missed.

When it comes to Bill C-34, I can tell members that I have been in Parliament for quite some time, and this is the third version we have seen of the bill. I am really happy. The first two were terrible, but this one is much better. My colleague, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, tabled a private member's bill on this topic, because I think we all agree that we need to protect children from online harms. That private member's bill, Bill C-216, informed a lot of the work of this one, which is definitely helpful.

What the bill would do is make what is illegal today in the real world illegal in the digital world. That is a simplification, but it is essentially what is happening. We really need to protect our children and ourselves because the rise in online harm has been unbelievable. In 2023, half of students were experiencing online bullying. In 2024, police reported 19,516 instances of online child exploitation, an increase of 59% over the previous year and an increase of 500% since 2014. In terms of harms, we see that they are not just online. They are becoming physical and mental harms.

I am still struck and saddened by what happened to Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons. We studied this the first year I was elected. These girls had, without their consent, intimate images of them put up on Facebook, and as a result, they both took their own lives. It is just terrible. This is where online harm can become physical harm.

We also see the impact on our children. The pandemic was a time when many people spent more time online and could not go outside. Young people's depression doubled. Their anxiety quadrupled. The suicide rate among young people doubled as well. Online harms are a real deal for our kids, and we all want to protect our kids.

Each parliamentarian in the House has probably experienced online vitriol aimed at them. Certainly I have. It was awful when I started, but I have seen nothing like what I saw in the last year. These are harms. These things are illegal, and we have to address them.

When it comes to online harm, people will ask what it really is. The things that are defined in the bill include content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor, intimate content communicated without consent, content that induces a child to harm themselves, content used to bully a child, content that foments extreme hatred, content that incites violence, and terrorism or violent extremism content. Essentially, those things would be covered.

There have been concerns expressed about the freedom of expression and some of the charter rights. Everyone will know that I am a passionate defender of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and certainly the government is well aware that people are concerned about who is going to determine what can be said and what cannot be said. We have a good definition of hate speech, which has been recently improved, but we need to make sure that everything is clear and that we not have overreach happen. In terms of privacy, I have also heard the concerns there. Bill C-36 would address many of the concerns that I have heard raised in debate today.

● (1340)

In addition to that, people have talked about the need for transparency. I want to be clear about the digital commission that would be put in place. Obviously, if we are going to try to do something about online harms, we need somebody whose job it is to respond when bad behaviour is pointed out and come up with a remedy. That is why we want to take the idea from Bill C-216 to put the onus on service providers to make sure they are enforcing the standards. However, this digital commission, which would have three to five experts in the area, would be responsible for enforcing the laws that are described, and every year it would report to the minister and produce a report that would be tabled here in Parliament. Then Parliament could have oversight to make sure that it is working, that there are no abuses and that we are comfortable with where it is headed.

There have also been discussions about under-16 age verification. Different techniques can be used, and I look forward to the discussions at committee reviewing what other countries have done and reviewing what people think is a better method to ensure age verification. There is everything from uploading an ID, which some people think is a privacy violation, to using AI to guess how old someone is. That is getting very accurate, but I do not want it to guess how old I am, so I will stop there.

The other thing we have to do is be realistic. We know that when Australia implemented this, 70% of kids under 16 found a way around the system, so this will probably happen. It is important to say what is bad behaviour, say it is illegal and put mechanisms in place to enforce the rule of law, but we will have to deal with how we as parents and legislators encourage kids not to expose themselves at a young age to what is really the wild west of the Internet, where content that they should not be seeing is showing up. We know it is harmful to them.

I think about when I grew up. I did not even have a TV until I was eight. I never had a cellphone until I was 30. There would be some advantage to not having the social harms that kids have to deal with when their maturity and the confidence they have in themselves are not yet developed.

Let us talk a bit about what the safety commission would do. It would review the safety plans that are prepared and published for the different social media AI chatbot services. It would evaluate whether the age verification mechanism that the services are using is adequate. It would maintain transparency from both social media and chatbot platforms in publishing their policies and thresholds for notifying the RCMP, police or other law enforcement. Let us keep in mind that what is illegal in the real world would be illegal digitally, but the people who would follow up on that would not be in the digital safety commission; they would be the police of jurisdiction in that area. The commission would also provide support for victims of online harms and users of online services, and it would have the ability to issue fines to platforms of up to 3% of their global revenue.

I have a lot of respect for the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. He has encouraged the government to consider more serious sentencing, especially in cases of child luring and sexual exploitation. I think the government should take that into consideration.

There are some potential myths we have heard about this bill because of some of the previous versions that were not great. Let me just quickly look to those. One is that the government would get access to our private data. That would be specifically excluded; that would not happen. I already talked about the freedom of speech and already talked about the other concerns. I have also heard from the Bloc the concern that this bill would violate provincial jurisdiction. I look forward to hearing those discussions at committee. They have implemented something with age 14, so the discussion of what age it should be is a very good discussion.

With that, I would be happy to answer any questions.

● (1345)

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right at the beginning, the member said that this is a better bill, and I think when it comes to children, we need the best. Under the seven categories of harmful content, Bill C-34 lists "content used to bully a child". There is currently no legal definition of bullying. I would like to ask the member if she can define what bullying is and provide an example.

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I am not a lawyer, so I highly recommend having a discussion with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola because he will know the answer to that, but I believe there is a bullying definition used in the law.

I would reiterate that some of the types of bullying we see use sexual images, for example, as in the Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons examples. I would point the member to the Twitter feed about me this past year if he wants to see what bullying looks like.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want congratulate my hon. colleague on her speech. It was very substantive. Of course, I am sorry that she had to endure so much harassment on social media. That is truly unacceptable.

At the end of her speech, she touched on several of the concerns that have been raised during this debate, including respect for areas of provincial jurisdiction, respect for Quebec and the provinces and, for example, flexibility regarding age.

In her view, does the bill, in its current form, provide sufficient flexibility? If, as she said, amendments were proposed during the committee study, would her party be open to improving the bill in this regard?

● (1350)

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I am not sufficiently familiar with the situation in Quebec.

I believe that Quebec has more experience with this issue, and I would be very pleased to see amendments tabled in committee.

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to commend my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong for her outstanding work.

I was honestly quite touched to hear her talk about her experience. She has been very courageous in all of this. I am very pleased to have her on our team. As I said, she is doing a great job.

That said, she mentioned at the beginning of her speech that there were other versions of this legislation that were not as good as this one. I would like her to tell us about the main ways in which this bill improves on them and what she likes most about this version of this very important bill.

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, there was something unacceptable in the previous versions.

[*English*]

The first two versions said that if somebody thought a person was going to commit a hate crime in the future, that person could be put in prison for up to 25 years. That seemed, to me, very much like the movie *Minority Report*. It is certainly not charter-compliant, so I am glad to see that it was removed.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I respect enormously the fact that the member is an engineer. I am a lawyer. I look at this bill and ask why we do not tighten it to create a real incentive for tech giants to live up to the duty to protect our children, enforceable by law. By attaching that duty specifically to the directors of the companies, they would feel a real incentive to avoid ending up with strict liability and going to jail if a child in Canada is harmed.

I want to put forward amendments to that effect when we get to committee. I will vote for the bill to get to committee. We need to tackle this. I wonder if she has any thoughts on the idea of tightening up the punishments.

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, as an engineer, I am very detail-oriented in general. I would say the more detail we can put in the bill and not leave to regulators or bureaucrats, the better. I look forward to the amendments the member opposite will bring to committee.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am truly grateful for this opportunity to speak to a topic that matters so much to me and to our fellow citizens. The digital safety act is not a response to some naive or made-up concern, nor are the proposals within it based on wishful thinking. It addresses a need that Canadians have been telling us about for some time. The whole world must contend with new realities, and it is time for our country to evolve and adapt to those realities. There is no doubt these challenges will keep getting bigger as technology evolves and as the people we represent require protection from new threats.

Let us wait no longer. Let us show that Canada knows how to evolve with the times. Let us also demonstrate, once again, what Canada is made of: We act for the good of all, including our young people.

Other G7 countries have passed legislation in response to this threat targeting our young people. For example, Australia has already enacted legislation raising the minimum age for social media access to 16. Here in this country, all Canadians, including parents and guardians, expect us to take action too.

Just as concerns about teenagers' access to social media platforms are well founded, the age proposed to allow them to access these platforms is also not random. It has been shown that the digital landscape is not safe for children under 16. For these children, the scales are more likely to tip towards harms than benefits. Setting a limit for children under 16 is consistent with scientific research, as well as with what other jurisdictions around the world have done.

Let me share some statistics.

In 2023, Canadian police recorded 19,516 incidents of online child sexual exploitation over the course of the year. Again, there were 19,516 incidents of online child sexual exploitation over a 12-month period in our country. That amounts to more than two cases per hour, every hour, over one year. That is unacceptable and alarming. This was a 59% increase over the previous year and a 500% increase over just a few years. We can therefore conclude that the longer we wait before taking real and effective action to put an end to this type of appalling behaviour, the more it will increase exponentially.

We must work together to address this threat, because there is still time. Bill C-34 is not a quick fix or a band-aid solution. Bill C-34 is not just about demonstrating that we are fulfilling our duty to protect Canada's young people. It is supported by many expert organizations, including the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, the Canadian Paediatric Society, Kids Help Phone and the youth advocacy sector. I would also note that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child encourages the protection of young people from information or material that is injurious to their well-being. Bill C-34 will ensure that we are in compliance with international ethical standards.

I would like to come back to some statistics. While social media cannot be blamed for everything, it is clear that its impact extends beyond physical safety of our kids, because it also has an impact on their mental health. Rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation have risen exponentially among young Canadians over the past year. I would like to reiterate some of the figures my colleagues have already highlighted. Among Canadians aged 15 to 24, rates of depression have doubled, while rates of anxiety have quadrupled. Without a robust bill such as Bill C-34, these statistics will continue to rise. These statistics represent the next generation of Canadians and the impact this has on their individual life paths.

● (1355)

I do not have enough time today to provide all the statistics on this subject. For example, I did not mention that one in four young people between the ages of 12 and 17 in this country report having been cyber-bullied. One in four is a lot. We cannot allow this situation to keep getting worse. Instead, we should help young people experience this brief period of their lives in safety, as most of us had the opportunity to do, without being exposed to the same level of harm they face today. At the very least, the far more limited exposure many of us experienced likely spared us some of the dangers and mental health challenges. Now is the time to step up and demonstrate that we care about our children.

I would also like to acknowledge my riding's efforts in this regard. Sherbrooke is at the forefront of efforts to protect young people online. One notable local initiative was spearheaded by a group of law students at the Université de Sherbrooke. Last spring, they drafted a bill to address the harmful effects of excessive screen time on young people. Among other things, the bill would ban access to Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat for those under 16. During a visit to the legislative buildings in Quebec City, the students said that they specifically targeted these apps because they are addictive. They also drew parallels with the arguments that led to the prohibition of alcohol and tobacco for minors.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Aslam Rana (Hamilton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we approach November 5, when our government will table budget 2026, I want to highlight what we have achieved through our previous budget. We removed the consumer carbon tax, introduced a GST rebate for first-time homebuyers, cut taxes for the middle class, made the national school food program permanent, hired 1,000 CBSA and 1,000 RCMP officers, introduced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, provided $25 billion in support for workers impacted by tariffs and invested $1.2 billion to protect our oceans.

A coalition of 19 Filipino Canadian organizations from every province recently submitted the community's first unified pre-budget submission. As the member of Parliament for Hamilton Centre, which has a vibrant and integral Filipino community, I look forward to budget 2026 and the opportunities it will create for Filipino Canadians and all Canadians.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Chak Au (Richmond Centre—Marpole, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Remembrance Day approaches, we honour those who sacrifice for our freedom. In the trenches, countless soldiers find hope and courage through their faith in God, yet the Liberal government has directed military chaplains to exclude references to God from prayers at public ceremonies. Faith in God has been a cornerstone of our country since Confederation, with roots in much older traditions. Our charter recognizes the supremacy of God. Our anthem declares, “God keep our land glorious and free”. How can we sing those words, yet bar chaplains from invoking God at our ceremonies?

Prayers comfort those who serve and those families who grieve. We must respect people of every faith and those of none. No one should be forced to pray, but there must be room for prayer. The Liberal government should respect the gratitude to God expressed by so many veterans and reverse—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

* * *

CLEAN50 AWARDS

Shannon Miedema (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand to recognize some of Canada's climate champions, this year's Clean50 honourees. Each year, the Clean50 awards celebrate Canada's sustainability heroes, recognizing the impact that individuals, community leaders, businesses and organizations have in addressing the climate crisis.

I am proud to be an alumni of this program. As we continue to experience the worsening impacts of climate change, it is more important than ever that we support our innovators and our trailblazers. Amazingly, over 10% of this year's Clean50 winners are based in Nova Scotia, some of whom I know well and have worked with.

I congratulate and welcome all of this year's honourees to the Clean50 family. Let us build our path to net zero together.

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ONTARIO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former mayor myself, I want to congratulate those elected in Simcoe—Grey in this week's municipal elections.

In the town of Blue Mountains, there is Mayor Moreau, Deputy Mayor Gilliland and councillors McKinlay, Porter, Loney, Dewitt and McLeod. In Collingwood, there is Mayor Hamlin, Deputy Mayor Potts and councillors Ferrigan, MacCulloch, Perry, Baines, McCrimmon, McLeod and Ring. In Wasaga Beach, there is Mayor Smith, Deputy Mayor Foley and councillors Graves, Dileo, White, Timms and Belanger. In Clearview, there is Mayor McArthur, Deputy Mayor McGillvray and councillors Houghton, Walters, Broderick, Walker and Brooks. In Adjala-Tosorontio, there is Mayor Anderson, Deputy Mayor Lachs and councillors Mason, Cox, Reiber, Patterson and Gervasi. Finally, in Essa, there is Mayor Macdonald, Deputy Mayor Smith and councillors Maltby, Sander and Kiezebrink.

I want to say best wishes and a big thank you to everyone who shared their vision and put their name on the ballot.

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ORLÉANS

Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 14, I was pleased to join the Carleton District School Board and the Mulroney family for the official opening of the Brian Mulroney Elementary School in Orléans. This new English public school will welcome nearly 700 students, inspiring future generations to learn, lead and succeed.

As we mark Small Business Week, I also wanted to recognize the local small businesses that are the backbone of Orléans' economy, creating jobs, supporting families and strengthening our community.

Finally, Orléans has much to celebrate. Two outstanding residents were recently recognized for their contributions. Gipsy Ghosh received the 2026 Famous 5 Ottawa award, while Amanda Kilabuk received the Governor General’s Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case. Their leadership and dedication inspire others and make our community proud.

Please join me in congratulating Gipsy and Amanda on these well-deserved honours.

● (1405)

RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ellen Crothers, a wonderful volunteer in S, D and G, for her outstanding community leadership and heartfelt service. Ellen was recently named the recipient of the Community Service Award at South Glengarry's business and community awards gala. Through the Mathew Crothers memorial charity, founded in honour of her son, she has transformed personal loss into lasting support for local families. Her dedication embodies the spirit and community values recognized by the award.

Mathew's Toy Mountain has, for two decades, collected donations and gifts for children in need and supported patients at CHEO. We are looking forward to the upcoming gala on November 7 to support the charity's work. Mathew's legacy is certainly being carried on through this vital work by Ellen and a great network of local supporters and donors.

I offer congratulations and thanks to Ellen. Mathew would be so proud to know of all the work being done in his memory.

Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, last week, history was made on the Hill as we—

The Speaker: I know that sometimes the noise comes from outside the walls of the chamber, but I think now it is coming from inside the chamber.

I will let the hon. member start over.

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FILIPINO-CANADIAN COALITION

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, history was made here at the House of Commons as we had the Filipino-Canadian Coalition, representing 19 national organizations from across Canada, from 10 provinces and one territory, come to talk about how to unlock the full potential and talent found within the Filipino community.

We know that the Filipino community has pushed so much to build this country economically and socially, and to build our cultural fabric. We are looking for ways to support it by building community infrastructure to unlock that talent. I will be working with the community to look for ways to build, and it wants to commit to building a stronger country, building Canada strong.

My thanks go to the Filipino-Canadian Coalition for all the work it is doing, bringing this network here to the House of Commons and building the Filipino community here in Canada.

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[*Translation*]

POLICY RATE

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Canadians received very bad news. The Bank of Canada has to raise the policy rate to 2.5%. That is the first increase in three years. This time, the Prime Minister cannot blame the old Liberal government.

In its report, the Bank of Canada indicates that grocery prices will increase more quickly in 2027 because of rising energy costs that are reverberating throughout the food supply chains. The bank also points out that rising diesel prices are driving up costs for farmers.

The Conservatives have been saying that for a while now. We have to develop our natural resources, eliminate federal fuel taxes to bring prices down, and give families a chance.

In practical terms, what do these increases mean for families? They mean higher mortgage payments, higher grocery prices, higher gas prices, and less money in families' pockets.

What is the Prime Minister, a former top banker, gearing up to do? He plans to spend, spend, spend, run deficits and add even more to the debt.

One thing is for sure: 11 years of Liberal rule has been quite costly.

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CANADA-EU SUMMIT

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, representatives of thousands of newspapers and magazines from both sides of the Atlantic wrote to Canada and the European Union. They are calling on them to use the upcoming summit as an opportunity to commit to regulating digital platforms and the use of AI. They are calling for the summit's final statement to include “a firm, shared commitment to free, independent, pluralistic and sustainable media and reliable professional journalism, underpinned by enabling frameworks.”

They also call on Canada and Europe to promote “a transparent AI ecosystem that respects intellectual property rights, supports licensing and appropriate remuneration, and enables creators, publishers and other cultural and creative businesses to control and realise the value of their works.”

Canadian and European media are highlighting the most significant global challenges for the future of culture and news. The Prime Minister must raise these issues at the Canada-EU summit today.

* * *

[*English*]

NAVAL HERITAGE INITIATIVE

Ernie Klassen (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize an important Canadian naval heritage initiative marking the 25th anniversary of Operation Apollo and the events of September 11, 2001.

A new project mapping Canada's naval response to 9/11 in the Middle East, HMCS *Vancouver*'s mission for Operation Apollo, will digitally preserve and share a critical chapter of our nation's military history. Supported by Veterans Affairs, this initiative is transforming historical ship logbooks into an interactive, web-based map documenting HMCS *Vancouver*'s 79 days in the North Arabian Sea.

I would like to recognize Blue Horizon Geomatics and my constituent, Theresa Fingler, whose experience aboard HMCS *Vancouver* brings exceptional depth and authenticity to the project. This initiative honours our veterans and ensures that their service is never forgotten.

* * *

● (1410)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are heartbroken by the horrific bombing at St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Jordan. Innocent lives were taken in a sacred moment of worship in a place that should have been a sanctuary. We grieve with the families of the people killed, and we pray for the wounded and for the community shaken to its core.

This attack is a painful reminder that the persecution of Christians is growing around the world. Freedom of worship is a fundamental human right, yet millions of believers, including here in Canada, still face violence, discrimination and fear simply for practising their faith.

Canada must stand firmly for religious freedom, demand justice for victims and work to protect vulnerable faith communities wherever they are threatened. Terror will not silence a prayer, and hatred will not extinguish faith.

Our prayers and unwavering solidarity remain with the victims, their families and persecuted Christians everywhere.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the horrific attack against Christians in the kingdom of Jordan that took place last Friday, when armed fanatics stormed a Greek Orthodox church and killed nine people and injured 40 during a funeral. They were killed only because they were Christians.

I appreciate and value the response and support of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein and the Jordanian authorities.

[*Translation*]

All minorities have an inalienable right to safety and dignity under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whether they are Muslim, Jewish or Christian. This attack is an assault on humanity and on the idea of peaceful coexistence between communities.

[*English*]

I stand in solidarity with the people of Jordan as well as with all Christians in the Middle East.

[*Translation*]

May the victims rest in peace and may they live on forever in our memory.

* * *

[*English*]

FINANCE

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's Bank of Canada interest rate adds to the gut-wrenching anxiety Canadians are feeling. Borrowing costs are going up right away for people with truck loans, variable rate mortgages and lines of credit. Those with fixed-rate mortgages facing renewal are wondering how big a hole this is going to blow in budgets that are already shot. The mountain that first-time homebuyers have to climb got steeper, while the costs of everything else keep going up. Higher costs are not going to do anything to help bring down the cost of rent.

The Bank of Canada says it acted because of high inflation. Well, the people of Nanaimo—Ladysmith will be watching the budget closely to see whether the government finally stops its inflationary spending. People are sick of having to put off necessary repairs, delay investments and put their lives on hold. We expect to see a credible plan to bring down the cost of food and gas and to make housing more attainable for our youth, not more announcements and promises that do not—

The Speaker: The hon member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

* * *

CANADA-MEXICO RELATIONS

Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, I am delighted to welcome here today in Ottawa a delegation of members of Mexico's chamber of deputies. ParlAmericas brings legislators from across the Americas and the Caribbean together to strengthen parliamentary dialogue and democratic governance and to build lasting partnerships.

Today's visits builds on the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas delegation's bilateral visit to Mexico last March, ahead of the joint review of CUSMA, where I had the honour of meeting and engaging with members of parliament from Mexico. That visit provided a timely opportunity to let our Mexican counterparts know the importance of maintaining strong Canada-Mexico co-operation as we look to the future of North American trade and economic integration.

Their presence here today is a testament to the strong bonds that exist between Canada and Mexico and to our shared commitment to democracy, dialogue and co-operation.

Bienvenida a toda la delegación mexicana en Canadá.

* * *

● (1415)

FINANCE

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Bank of Canada raised interest rates to 2.5%, the first hike since July 2023, adding more pressure on Canadian families. The bank's own press release warned of "the risk that continuing high energy prices spread broadly to the prices of other goods and services." Governor Macklem also warned that further increases may be necessary.

Canada is blessed with abundant energy resources. Our policies should reflect that advantage, not undermine it. Monetary policy cannot carry the burden of economic stability alone. As government spending increases, fiscal discipline and affordable energy must be central to the government's policy, not casualties of it.

The Prime Minister once understood price stability from the governor's chair. It is now time to demonstrate that same understanding from the Prime Minister's Office, exercise fiscal restraints and eliminate the industrial carbon tax.

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[*Translation*]

STUDENTS VISITING PARLIAMENT

Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am very pleased to welcome the students of École secondaire Saint-Maxime, which is in my riding of Vimy, in Laval.

By visiting Parliament, they are getting a wonderful opportunity to learn about the institutions that shape our country and the democratic values that unite us and make our nation free, welcoming and among the most prosperous in the world. Visiting Parliament is the best way for anyone, especially a young person, to truly understand how our representative democracy works.

I want to express my gratitude to the staff of École secondaire Saint-Maxime for their dedication to these young people. I also want to thank all those who contribute to their future success and their growth as responsible citizens. In Canada, everyone can find a place to belong, make their voice heard and achieve their dreams while playing an active role in civic life.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Canadians can no longer afford food or housing, the Prime Minister tried to divert their attention with his grand plan to become an associate member of the European Union. No one knows what that means, and the Europeans rejected it yesterday.

We already have a free trade agreement with Europe, but nine countries have not ratified it.

Does the Prime Minister promise to get them to ratify the agreement, or is this summit just for show?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are delighted to have the Prime Minister, as well as many of my colleagues, in Montreal today for our annual meeting with European Union leaders. We will explore a wide range of opportunities for collaboration beyond the free trade agreement we have already negotiated.

Canada needs to diversify its markets, and that is exactly what we are doing.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has tried to distract Canadians from crazy housing and food costs for the last two months with his big project of Canada becoming an associate member of the EU. Nobody knows what it means and the Europeans have now rejected it. We already have a free trade agreement with Europe. It is just that nine of its countries refuse to ratify that agreement.

Will the Prime Minister actually get anything real done at this big grand summit, get those countries to ratify the deal, let in our beef or is this just another Seinfeld summit, a meeting about nothing?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if anyone would know anything about Seinfeld, it is that leader who wakes up every day and lives the same recurring nightmare, every single day.

The Prime Minister and my colleagues are in Montreal for the annual Canada-EU Summit. This year we are exploring many areas of further co-operation beyond the free trade arrangements we have with Europe. We are going to diversify our markets, we going to diversify them away from the United States, and that is good news for Canada.

● (1420)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is actually a recurring nightmare for the Canadian people who cannot afford to pay their grocery bills and whose mortgage payments just went up yesterday because of deficit spending by the government. The Prime Minister acts like George Costanza, running around the office trying to look busy while achieving nothing at all in the real world.

Let us look at this. Nine countries have not ratified the EU free trade agreement. Will he get them to ratify? They are still blocking our beef. Will he remove those blockages? They are threatening an industrial carbon tariff. Will he have that removed, or will it just be about nothing?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this guy talks like Kramer. He just walks into the room and, every time, says something weird.

More seriously, free trade with Europe is a great thing for Canada. More collaboration with Europe on defence and procurement, and making sure that Canadians and Canadian youth can study and research, and we can co-operate on things like AI.

Yes, his least favourite topic will be co-operating on democracy. I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition. It is going to be great.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everybody loves Kramer.

If he wants to talk about something weird, the Prime Minister told us that if we brought in a big industrial carbon tax on our steel, aluminum, cement and concrete, the Europeans would let our industrial goods in tariff-free. It turns out they are now threatening a carbon tariff on Canada, at the same time the Prime Minister holds his grand summit.

He has already failed to get American tariffs lifted, like he promised in the election. Can Prime Minister tell us, is he going to stand up to the Europeans and make sure there is no carbon tariff on our goods?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, among the many areas of co-operation with Europe that we will obviously be discussing today and will be discussing going forward, in terms of our much closer arrangement with the European Union, will indeed be energy.

I noted with great pleasure that my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources saluted the fact that the first gas shipments going to Germany left the West Coast in these past months, and we can expect much more energy co-operation with our friends in the European Union.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has told Canadians for the last two years to ignore their grocery bills, their rising gas prices and the fact that an entire generation cannot afford a place to live because he has got these grand signing ceremonies of meaningless documents. Here we are, with no commitment from the nine European holdouts to sign on and ratify the existing free trade agreement we have or to allow our beef in or to cancel their planned carbon tariff.

Why is the Prime Minister not delivering real results? Is it because this is just another public relations stunt?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a free trade arrangement with Europe. It is in effect right now. I have even better news. The Prime Minister has set an ambitious objective for Canada to double our non-U.S. exports. I want to tell the leader the news is in: We are on track and beyond to doubling our non-U.S. exports over the next 10 years. We will do it by investing in our ports. We will do it by investing in projects, in energy and especially in our people by building Canada strong.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have to admire the hubris of a party whose members stands up over there and brag about promises that they have made that they have not kept. They are going to a summit with a continent that already has a free trade agreement, but nine of its members have not signed on to it. They will not commit to getting a single one of those countries to sign. In fact, not one of their leaders will be there. Then they are blocking our beef and pork, and the Liberals will not commit to getting that removed at this summit.

Speaking of beef and pork, is this not just another big nothing burger?

● (1425)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians look, with a great deal of pride, at the events in Montreal today, where our Prime Minister is going to break new trails in terms of co-operation with the European Union, and with new arrangements in AI, in democracy, in transportation and in trade. These are all areas where we can more closely collaborate with our European friends, diversify our markets, build Canada strong, and make sure that Canada works with like-minded nations to keep our people prosperous and keep our people working.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec wants to boost trade with Europe in the face of the tariff crisis, but CBC is reporting that Canada is going to hamper our efforts.

The European Union imposes tariffs on products from countries with poor environmental records. Since Canada, unlike Quebec, has scrapped its carbon pricing, it is exposing us to penalties. An internal memo estimates that $2.8 billion worth of goods will be subject to tariffs next year, including $800 million on aluminum, steel and iron from Quebec alone.

Do the Liberals realize that their climate capitulation is standing in the way of Quebec trade?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is peddling all sorts of falsehoods.

First, we are working with the European Union on a wide range of collaborative projects, whether in the fields of artificial intelligence, democracy or closer co-operation in a number of areas.

We are also working with the European Union because it needs energy. I was particularly interested to hear my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, announce that the first shipments of LNG have left Canada's west coast.

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the CBC must appreciate the minister's disregard for it.

For years, the Bloc Québécois has been warning the federal government that Quebec will be hit harder by European tariffs if Canada ends its carbon pricing. Well, that time has come. Even if Quebec maintains its carbon pricing, 800 million dollars' worth of our Quebec metals will still be subject to tariffs. Thanks to Canada, we are going to face more customs barriers.

Are the Liberals proud of the harm they are doing to Quebec's exports?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's aluminum is one of the greenest in the world. Our government has attracted new investments and collaborations with Canadian aluminum producers, and we are not stopping there.

To be very clear: If the Bloc Québécois is interested in reducing greenhouse gases, all it has to do is support the biggest greenhouse gas reduction project of all: the high-speed rail project connecting cities in Quebec to cities Ontario.

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Europe is going to impose tariffs on Quebec's aluminum, steel and iron exports because of Canada.

This may not end with metal exports, because the Liberals also weakened pesticide regulations and even gave themselves the power to reintroduce banned pesticides. Europe has strict standards in this area as well, so that will hinder agri-food trade. Unlike the Liberals, Europe takes these issues seriously.

Do they now realize how much their irresponsible deregulation will cost Quebec?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Europe is throwing open its doors to co-operation with Canada. It was a historic day, during which we explored a wide range of opportunities to deepen our co-operation with France, Romania, Spain and Germany. We will continue to strengthen these relationships across a number of sectors, expanding access to European markets for Canadian companies and individuals, including Quebeckers, who stand to benefit greatly.

* * *

[*English*]

FINANCE

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General released a sobering report on Canada's anti-money laundering watchdog, FINTRAC, which reports directly to the Minister of Finance. Here is the bottom line up front. The AG said, "FINTRAC did not effectively carry out its role in overseeing compliance with Canada's anti-money laundering laws" and that "limited FINTRAC's ability to help detect, prevent, and deter money laundering."

Does the Minister of Finance accept the Auditor General's findings that his agency is failing to prevent money laundering, terrorist financing and sanctions evasion in Canada?

● (1430)

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, our government is committed to protecting the integrity of Canada's financial system and supporting the institutions that safeguard it. We are taking concrete steps to develop a national anti-fraud strategy in collaboration with industry partners and agencies. We are also creating the financial crimes agency, which will lead the fight against sophisticated financial crimes with increased RCMP resources. If the Conservatives are concerned about combatting money laundering, we encourage them to support Bill C-29.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the government was serious about this issue, it would have created the agency, which it promised in 2021, and it would not have missed the legal deadline to review the Proceeds of Crime, Money Laundering, and Terrorist Financing Act.

The reality is that police need timely access to this information, and yet the Auditor General found that it took on average 112 days for FINTRAC to give law enforcement information, and said that it was, "too late to be useful."

Why is the Minister of Finance not giving police across Canada the tools and information they need to stop money laundering and terrorist financing?

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, again, our government is committed to protecting and safeguarding the integrity of Canada's financial system. We have taken concrete steps to develop an anti-fraud strategy in collaboration with many partners. We are in the process of creating the financial crimes agency that will lead the fight against ever more sophisticated financial crimes. We have given the RCMP additional resources to help coordinate these efforts. If the Conservatives are concerned about this issue, they should support our bill, Bill C-29.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada says inflation is rising and economic growth is slowing, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer says interest on the national debt is the fastest-growing government expense. The cost of government is driving up the cost of living and these Liberals have broken every fiscal promise, smashed through every fiscal guardrail and cut loose every fiscal anchor they have ever set. For 11 straight years, they have tabled deficits.

When will the government finally stop its inflationary deficit spending?

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, unlike the Conservatives, we believe in the independence of monetary policy in our central bank, and we know that inflation is being driven by the war in the Middle East.

Unlike the Conservatives, we are stepping up every single day in this House to offer more affordability supports for Canadians when they need it most. We have cut taxes on income, housing, fuel and new business investment. We have enhanced and increased access to federal benefits, like the groceries and essentials benefit, and we are investing to create tens of thousands of new jobs all across Canada. That is how we build Canada strong. That is how we support Canadians.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unemployment is up, grocery costs are up, inflation is up and now interest rates are up. Yesterday, deficit-fuelled inflation caused the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates, with the six big banks following. For those who own a home, their mortgage payment just got more expensive, and for those aspiring to buy one, that dream has just been pushed further out of reach, all because the Prime Minister could not control his spending.

With their upcoming budget, will the Liberals stop their inflationary spending?

Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Conservative caucus members from Saskatchewan awaken from their slumber, this is what has been happening in Saskatchewan.

Since June alone, I have been part of federal announcements representing a more than $467-million investment in Saskatchewan, and canola sales are increasing. We have spent money in support of child care, and canola sales are improving. We have spent money in community infrastructure, and canola sales are improving. We have spent money in indigenous communities, and canola sales are improving.

I think maybe the member and the entire Saskatchewan—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk.

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is terrible news for all Canadian families. Yesterday, the Bank of Canada announced that, for the first time in three years, the key interest rate is set to rise and inflation is set to climb to 3.5% for the year as a whole.

What does this mean in practical terms? It means that mortgage rates will rise. It risks slowing home sales, placing additional pressure on homeowners and bringing housing construction to a standstill.

Is there a single minister in this government who actually understands that colossal debts and deficits lead to inflation?

● (1435)

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had been paying attention to what the government has been doing for almost a year and a half now, he would see that we have been focusing on affordability. We lowered taxes for 22 million Canadians. We introduced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit.

However, there is something that I still do not understand and that is why I am asking him this question: Given the cost of living, why did he vote against the Canada child benefit, which provides $79 million for 22,845 children in his riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk? That is approximately $3,500 per child in his riding, and his riding is home to nearly 23,000 children.

Why did he vote against that?

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the minister to update his statistics or, at the very least, check with the the Governor of the Bank of Canada to get the latest figures. The governor is the one saying that the Liberals' management of the economy is a complete mess. What is the result? Grocery prices are going to go up. The governor is saying that prices will rise faster than last year, and things were already terrible last year. That is what life is like after 11 years of Liberal governance.

Can the minister tell Canadians or the Governor of the Bank of Canada why the Liberals' inflationary policies are causing grocery prices to rise even more sharply this year than last year?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about Canada's fiscal position. Canada is one of only two G7 countries with a AAA rating. We have a better debt-to-GDP ratio and deficit-to-GDP ratio than our G7 peers.

However, what I still do not understand is why the member insists on systematically voting against measures that have a very direct impact, whether it is a tax cut, the groceries and essentials benefit or the Canadian dental care plan. Those programs affect 23,614 residents in his riding, not to mention the 23,000 children who are benefiting from the Canada child benefit.

If he wants to talk about helping families, he should put his vote where his mouth is.

[*English*]

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Breakfast Club of Canada told committee this week that the $1-billion school food program has lost 22% of its grocery purchasing power because of inflation, yet the minister keeps insisting that the program feeds an extra 400,000 kids a year. The math does not math. When we divide the money over five years and 180 school days per year, it averages less than three dollars per target child per day, but a five-province study found that the average lunch costs $6.45, double, which feeds a lot fewer kids.

Will the minister table the national data and costing behind her claims? Hungry kids want to check her homework.

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.): Mr. Speaker, we absolutely take no lessons from the other side of the House when it comes to the national school food program. I was at that committee meeting, and I heard from the Coalition for Healthy School Food, from the Breakfast Club of Canada and from students who have written to our Prime Minister about how the national school food program is helping them every single day in their schools. The member should listen up.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, no one should be surprised to see the Premier of Quebec asserting his role on the international stage. Yesterday, I asked the most senior officials at Global Affairs Canada whether they were familiar with the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine. Not one of them could tell me what it was. It has been the cornerstone of Quebec's international relations policy for over 60 years, yet Ottawa has never heard of it.

How is it possible that the federal bureaucracy has become so out of touch with Quebec?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, Quebec is a distinct nation that flourishes within a strong Canada.

In an increasingly dangerous and divided world, we must be masters in our own home and build reliable partnerships for Canadians. We recognize Quebec's unique economic and cultural interests, and we will continue to work with its government, particularly in areas such as education, culture and the francophone community.

The Canadian economy is stronger when we work together.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for over 60 years, Quebec has conducted its own international relations in areas under its jurisdiction. It has been doing so for more than 60 years. However, it is clear that Canada does not respect Quebec's prerogatives, as illustrated by Canada's refusal to let Mr. St-Pierre Plamondon speak at the Canada-European Union summit. That is not even the worst of it.

The federal government is no longer even aware of Quebec's prerogatives. This strikes me as the ultimate proof that Canada does not understand our nation and cannot speak for us. Is that not true?

● (1440)

Hon. Mona Fortier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the provinces and territories bring valuable expertise to Canada's international relationships.

The fact that Montreal is hosting the Canada-European Union summit reflects Quebec's important role in strengthening this partnership. We have always worked closely with the provinces and territories, and we will continue to do so to diversify our relationships abroad. We are focused on delivering real results for Canadians across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Kelowna, a man violently chokes his wife. He is arrested. He is released on bail. Thirty minutes later, he shows up again. He assaults her again. He chokes her again. He is arrested again. Under the Liberal laws, guess what: He is released on bail again. The Liberals promised they would fix the broken bail system, but nothing has changed. Under their watch, intimate partner violence is up 40%.

How many times must a woman be attacked before the Liberals put her safety first?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because we are so concerned about incidents such as this, we put forward the Protecting Victims Act in Bill C-16, and we put forward the bail reform legislation. It all passed in June. Those laws have been implemented starting July 15, but it is the job of the provinces to make sure they are applying these pieces of legislation. The changes have gone into effect in the code. It is time for the provinces to catch up.

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the criminals are laughing at the Liberal justice system, and the victims are the ones paying the price. A guy with 274 convictions gets bail. Convicted child killers and rapists are attending cooking classes and law school. McDonald's, booze, drugs and illegal guns are being delivered by drones into our maximum-security prisons. It sounds insane but that is the sad reality under the Liberal government.

Will the Liberals put the criminals behind bars and stop putting Canadian lives at risk?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is responsible for the Criminal Code of Canada. We have made an unprecedented number of changes to stiffen our laws, to make sure criminals will serve longer sentences and so repeat offenders do not get bail, but it is the job of the provinces to apply these new changes. I hope the provinces will catch up.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals constantly boast about how they fixed bail in their eyes. We as Conservatives warned them that they did not go far enough.

Recently in Kelowna, a man was accused of assaulting and choking his intimate partner. He was released on bail. Within 30 minutes, he is alleged to have been back at her house, again choking her, and now breaching a no-contact order. He was again released on bail.

People expect the government to protect the most vulnerable. Will the Liberals admit that their bail changes did not go far enough, and commit to acting?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague had actually read the legislation that we put forward, he would know that, on the advice of the provincial government in British Columbia, we added specific provisions to address cases of intimate partner violence that involve strangulation, because we know and accept that it is predictive of future violence. When we adapt these laws, we expect provinces to put them into action by appropriately resourcing the system and those who are appointed to make decisions to put these rules into force.

Tragic circumstances such as these can motivate change. We have taken action, and we are looking forward to seeing the changes implemented by the people within positions—

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice asked whether I bothered to read his bill. Did he bother to read my bill on the intimate partner violence that happened to Bailey McCourt? I will let the House know that this offence occurred in Kelowna. Do members know what else occurred in Kelowna? The murder of Bailey McCourt, who was killed three hours after her abuser left the courthouse after conviction.

It is our job as parliamentarians to protect the most vulnerable. The Liberals should have passed our jail not bail act, which was exponentially harder on bail.

Will the Liberals admit they have a problem on their hands and they need to fix it now?

● (1445)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member questions whether I read his bill. He should know very well that I have, because we worked together across partisan lines to rewrite that bill. He should know that we worked together with family members in the tragic circumstances of Bailey McCourt's murder to ensure that she did not die in vain, and to change the law in this country to protect future victims of intimate partner violence and murder against harms we know are preventable.

I appreciated the member's non-partisan spirit of collaboration. It is a shame that it seems to have come to an end.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was heartbreaking news out of Toronto this morning. Three masked suspects armed with handguns and a hammer forced their way into a family's home, and a father and his two daughters were shot. This is the kind of chaos that Canadians are facing. It is time for the Liberals to pass our stand on guard act and our safe at home bill that would strengthen protections for Canadians by strengthening our self-defence laws and ensuring that we have laws on the books that protect families in their own home.

Will the Liberals pass these laws so we can protect Canadians and restore safe homes, yes or no?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the incident referenced by the member is a very tragic news story that I learned about today as well. I hear that the Toronto Police Service has an ongoing investigation. We are waiting for the investigation's findings.

Of course, we are adamant about making sure that criminals who enter anyone's home are caught and appropriately sentenced. That is why we have made an unprecedented number of changes to the Criminal Code of Canada. It is the job of local police and the local courts that are provincially run to now—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Oakville West.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the work our government is doing to diversify Canadian trade matters for the workers in my riding of Oakville West, who produce top-quality products that are in demand around the world. The recently concluded Canada-U.A.E. trade agreement marks a historic milestone for our country to expand trade ties with our largest trading partner in the Middle East.

Could the Minister of International Trade update the House on how our record-setting U.A.E. trade agreement will help Canadian businesses across the country tap into this fast-growing market and ensure that Canadian workers and exporters compete and win on the world stage?

Hon. Maninder Sidhu (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to thank my colleague from Oakville West for her work in the House and, of course, on the trade committee.

This week, we signed a historic trade agreement with the U.A.E. in a record 47 days, the fastest trade agreement ever negotiated by Canada. Once in force, this new trade agreement will lower tariffs on 99% of Canada's exports to the U.A.E. That means new opportunities for Canadian workers and businesses and a market value of over $700 billion. That is more access for Canadian agriculture, aerospace, energy, lumber and more.

Plan A is working. We are diversifying and are building Canada strong.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent data shows that we have an innovation exodus to the United States. It is up 142%. Thirty-four per cent of immigrants with a Ph.D. leave Canada within 25 years, and the innovation sector earns 46% more in the United States.

The Liberals have brought in too many people too fast for housing and health care, and now Canada's best and brightest are leaving, including those who bring real innovation and jobs to our economy. Why is the Prime Minister not trying to reverse this brain drain instead of planning for higher immigration levels?

[*Translation*]

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, innovation and research are very important priorities for our government.

[*English*]

Budget 2025 launched an international talent attraction strategy and action plan. This will support recruitment of world-class researchers and advance Canada's global competitiveness and research excellence.

What we have also seen in the last six to nine months is that a large number of U.S.-based, top-notch researchers have come to Canada, including to Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and this will accelerate—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara South.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are sitting in an immigration system that has over 30,000 people who want to come to Canada under the start-up visa program and are stuck in bureaucratic purgatory. That is not progress. That is a failure of our system.

On the flip side, today's national security strategy is a nothingburger and fails to address the serious screening problems for non-citizens seeking entry to Canada. The CBSA had 675 reports seeking deportation on national security grounds, but only 44 people were actually removed.

This is a disaster, so will the Liberals reduce immigration levels—

● (1450)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a historic day for Canada. We released a national security strategy that encompasses an all-of-government approach toward strategic national security. We will, in the coming weeks and months, release specific strategies toward public safety, as well as intelligence, defence, the economy and foreign policy. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us to ensure that we have a strategic view of national security.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the strategy the minister mentioned could have been an email. It was very slim, and it said nothing about one of Canada's biggest security issues, which is the failure to screen people who are coming into the country. Now the Prime Minister wants to increase immigration levels.

CSIS screening requests hit a record 538,000 in 2024, and permanent residency files for full security screening are now projected to take years to clear. Why does this national security strategy say nothing about these things?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the national security strategy is all-encompassing and has many elements of what my friend opposite is seeking. I can assure her that as part of the public safety portfolio, we are working toward finalizing a more comprehensive response that includes security screening. It is an essential part of keeping Canadians safe.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, if I hit Ctrl+F on that document, I cannot find anything about improved security screening for non-citizens entering Canada. I would refer him to that document, and I would also refer him to the results. When Ahmed Eldidi entered Canada, he was allowed to do so in spite of the fact that there was a video circulating that showed him essentially committing an ISIS-level crime. He was convicted of a crime afterward, and the Persian community now wants clear public screening criteria that distinguishes forced conscripts from senior officials and terrorist leaders. Why did this strategy not do any of that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly hope the member opposite went beyond Ctrl+F to read this document. It is an essential part of ensuring the safety and security of Canadians. There are elements in there that will, over the next several weeks and months, make it abundantly clear that this is about ensuring the safety and security of every Canadian while ensuring that strategic security objectives are met.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal inflation continues to drive up the cost of living, forcing interest rates up. Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's wife was just appointed as Canada's new ocean envoy, with 1.2 billion taxpayer dollars tied to these initiatives. The Liberals say that she is working for free, but unpaid should not mean unaccountable.

The minister's office will not say if she is seeking donations from banks or industry, or what government resources she is using. Conservatives tried to invite her to the fisheries and oceans committee to get answers, but the Liberals blocked it.

Why will they not allow her to come to committee?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Speaker, Canada is a world leader in oceans conservation. We have a number of programs, as the member correctly points out, to protect our oceans and protect the species, including species at risk, that exist in the oceans. We will today and tomorrow announce further measures to protect our oceans.

Many ministers are responsible for a variety of these programs. They are, of course, always accountable for the spending that is undertaken in the name of oceans conservation. We thank the Prime Minister's wife for her leadership on this file.

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having government appointees appear before committee is standard practice. The Liberals made the unusual decision to appoint the Prime Minister's wife to this role. That should mean more transparency, not less.

Lobbyists and special interest groups are celebrating that they have access to the Prime Minister's wife, and $1.2 billion is not a small amount of money. Canadians deserve to know what her responsibilities are, what authority she has and how their money is being spent.

What do the Liberals have to hide by blocking her appearance?

● (1455)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just answered, the Prime Minister's spouse has volunteered to spearhead Canadian efforts in public diplomacy and oceans conservation. Ministers remain responsible and accountable for answering any and all questions about our programming on oceans conservation.

What I would like to know in terms of accountability—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The minister can continue.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to know in terms of accountability is where the member was when we announced $70 billion of investment at Churchill Falls, which is going to put Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to work for the next generation. She was nowhere to be found. Let us have accountability, please.

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STEEL AND ALUMINUM INDUSTRY

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals sure talk a good game. They are like the used car salesman people really like, until their tire falls off as they are driving home.

Let me explain. Every day, they get up and talk about how they are there for Canadian businesses and for workers, yet when National Steel Car got in touch seeking tariff relief, what did it get? It got crickets. It makes steel railcars with 98% Canadian content.

When it actually matters, why are the Liberals always either MIA or sending useless letters?

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, useless letters? Clearly, someone here is out of touch with reality.

A letter that contains a commitment by the Government of Canada to assist a company to modernize, to buy new equipment, to expand production and to find new markets, is that a useless letter? I could have many other letters like that. That is what we have been doing over the past six months.

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really glad the member wants some reality. Let us have some reality.

Stellantis needed help from the government. What did it get? Nothing. CAMI needed support from the government. What did it get? Nothing. PACCAR needed support from the government. What did it get? Nothing. Algoma needed support from the government. What did it get? Nothing. Stelco workers needed support from the government. What did they get? They got a useless letter.

Now National Steel Car needs help from the government. What is it going to get, another useless letter?

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Algoma Steel? Do you really want to go there?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: It is not me who wants to go there. Members can go where they want, but I do not care.

The hon. member may continue.

Carlos Leitão: Mr. Speaker, on Algoma Steel, we have been trying, and succeeding, to keep the company alive and help it pivot to a new way of making steel so that it can be the preferred supplier of high-quality steel for the shipbuilding industry.

Algoma Steel, really?

[*Translation*]

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' abandonment of the steel sector is causing tremendous harm to Canadian workers. Following the loss of 500 jobs at Stelco, another 2,000 jobs are now being lost across Canada. In recent months, dozens of Quebec businesses have contacted us to denounce the Liberal government, which is completely out of touch with reality. These businesses have submitted concrete recommendations to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Industry in hopes of securing their survival.

My question is simple: Why has neither of these Liberal ministers listened to Quebec businesses?

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been doing exactly that for at least six months, especially in my colleague's region and in the Centre-du-Québec region. We have visited dozens of small and medium-sized businesses.

Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions has programs tailored to the tariff response to assist businesses. My colleague should speak with these businesses, because they will confirm what we have done over the past six months and will continue to do.

* * *

● (1500)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first nations and Inuit policing is a matter of fairness and equity. Policing in first nations and Inuit communities has been underfunded for far too long. The courts and the Parliamentary Budget Officer have told us that clearly.

This week, the Prime Minister convened a first ministers' meeting with first nations leadership for the first time in over two decades to advocate shared priorities, including on security and community safety, and announced historic funding of close to $634 million over four years and over $250 million annually to renew and expand first nations and Inuit policing agreements.

Can the Minister of Public Safety update this House and Canadians on that?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma for his hard work and advocacy.

Every indigenous community deserves to feel and be safe. This historic funding supports police services such as the Tsuut'ina Nation Police Service in Alberta. This is on top of the $140 million for indigenous-led crime prevention and public safety programming, like community safety officers. These investments in policing support community-led solutions, close gaps and ensure that indigenous people have the tools they need to ensure their safety and security.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska—des-Sources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada's October report indicates that inflation is at nearly 3%, economic growth is less than 1%, thousands of jobs are being lost, businesses are cutting back on investment and, month after month, they are absorbing the cost of tariffs, but at some point they will have to pass them on to consumers.

On top of all that, the policy rate went up. That is the result of the Liberal strategy. Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. That is the Liberals' real record.

Will the government finally follow the Conservative plan to give Canadians some breathing room?

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am confused about what my colleague is saying because, quite simply, the Conservatives have no plan to make life more affordable for families.

On the contrary, they have consistently voted against everything we have done since the beginning of the year. From the very start, they have been telling us that the government has no business getting involved in building affordable housing. We are there. We are already hard at work. Rents have gone down over the past 24 months.

Tens of thousands of housing starts are under way thanks to the programs that we put in place.

Let us be serious. The Conservatives need to get to work.

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[*English*]

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the plans Conservatives have announced. Just today, we announced an exciting new idea to support families: allowing both parents to simultaneously claim the CPP child-rearing dropout. This means families who share caregiving responsibilities would no longer be penalized in the calculation of their pension eligibility.

Parents should not have to choose between spending time with their kids and protecting their retirement. Will the finance minister include this constructive proposal in the upcoming budget?

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.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are going to take no lessons from the Conservatives in terms of affordability for families. We have been delivering it. We have put in place longer parental leave options, shared parental benefits, greater support for working families and, perhaps most importantly and most historically, a Canada-wide early learning and child care program saving families over $16,000 a year in some cases, which the member opposes.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are zero for one in terms of answering my questions.

The Bank of Canada is now confirming that it is harder than ever for unemployed Canadians to find work, as we have now hit a 29-year low in labour force participation. Meanwhile, the fisheries minister saw no problem with subsidizing a company that fired Canadians to hire illegal workers.

The Liberals put the shellfish interests of this foreign company ahead of Canadian workers. Will the fisheries minister finally stand up and explain why they subsidized the company that fired Canadians to hire illegal workers?

Ernie Klassen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Conservatives have a member from Alberta asking questions about the fisheries in Atlanta Canada.

The member is trying to spin a single project from 2024 that was not even for employment. It was for crab processing equipment. I am sure the member has no idea how the fishery works, but the Atlantic fisheries fund has funded more than 1,300 projects in communities across Atlantic Canada, and our government just signed a new deal with Atlantic provinces for $300 million in new funding.

* * *

● (1505)

THE ECONOMY

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a shifting global economy, Canadians and businesses need fewer barriers and faster, more efficient government services. Our government recently introduced Bill S-7, the cutting red tape for all Canadians act. I would ask the President of the Treasury Board to explain how these measures will make life easier for Canadians and help Canadian businesses compete and grow.

Hon. Shafqat Ali (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to grow businesses, we need to cut red tape, reduce burdens and lower costs. The cutting red tape for all Canadians act would do just that. We are focused on maintaining strong protections for public health, safety and the environment. Our goal is clear: less time on paperwork and more time to innovate.

We are building Canada strong.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers along the high-speed rail route want to be heard by the Liberal government, and they deserve to be heard. However, it seems that the government listens more to visitors from Europe. What is wrong with this picture? The Liberals are silencing Canadians whose land will be expropriated by European-style projects that have no guarantee of long-term profitability.

When will this Liberal government do something about Canadians' suffering by axing the federal taxes on diesel?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it should come as no surprise that the Conservatives are doubling down on their opposition to a promising project that will benefit all Quebeckers.

Of course we will continue to listen to the agricultural community when it comes to building high-speed rail. We will also continue to listen to the agricultural community when it comes to the cost of fuel. We have cut the tax and we have extended that cut in fuel prices for the farming community. We will continue to listen.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberal government, with the help of the Conservatives, is bulldozing through the anti-environment, anti-indigenous and anti-worker Bill C-39, scientists report that fossil fuel-driven climate change caused a 275% increase in deaths due to wildfire smoke in Canada. It is proof the Liberals' corporate agenda is putting lives at risk and jeopardizing a livable planet.

Will the government listen to scientists, save lives, stop fuelling the climate emergency and withdraw Bill C-39?

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to disagree. We have the best science, we have the best standards and we are going to keep to them.

I am always pleased to work with all of my colleagues here as we move forward to fight climate change and protect the environment. We have introduced the national electricity strategy, we are going to double the electrical grid by 2030, we have invested $3.8 billion in the nature strategy to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030, and we have invested $1.2 billion to protect oceans, marine conservation, whales and indigenous partnership.

* * *

FINANCE

Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are being hammered by the rising cost of living, and yesterday brought another blow with the Bank of Canada hiking interest rates for the first time since 2023. This means higher credit card bills, bigger mortgage payments and more expensive loans for working families. It will put added strain on small businesses and things will get worse. The Bank of Canada forecasts inflation to soar through 2027.

Why is the Liberal government failing to bring down the cost of living and make life more affordable for Canadians?

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 the Bank of Canada and its monetary policy are independent. It has to keep inflation within the target range. Obviously, inflation is being driven by conflicts in the Middle East and the oil price shocks. The member opposite knows that well.

We have invested in the Canadian economy. We have strengthened affordability supports and measures, and social support programs like the groceries and essentials benefit. That is real support. It amounts to thousands of dollars per month with child care, dental care and the national school food program. There are all kinds of supports that really impact families' lives. That makes life easier.

We are doing all that while investing in a more prosperous future.

* * *

● (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Cory Bellmore, Minister of Community Services for the Yukon Territory.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order arising out of question period. We have just been through a difficult and divisive separation referendum in Alberta, where many of us worked hard to make the case for the equality of all provinces and the right of all provinces to be heard. That includes the right of representatives from every region in the House to be heard and to speak about national issues.

Business of the House

During question period, a parliamentary secretary made decidedly unparliamentary remarks, disparaging the right of members from Alberta to participate in national conversations on national issues—

The Speaker: It would not be proper if somebody did that, but unfortunately, the Chair did not hear that. It would not be proper for a member to say that to another member from any province.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I do not know who it was. I will check the record.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour for me to rise in place of the House leader for the official opposition to ask this question. As he says every time, all Canadians are eagerly awaiting this moment. This is an opportunity for us to ask the government what is in store for us next week.

However, before we look ahead to next week, it is worth taking a brief look back. It was a tough week for the government, especially when we learned from the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report that $703 billion would be added to the national debt over the next five years. We also learned that inflation is up to 3.1% and that the Bank of Canada has raised interest rates. Finally, the Governor of the Bank of Canada told us that families will unfortunately have to pay more for food next year.

Next week, the government will, in a sense, turn a Thursday into a Tuesday by tabling its budget on that day, rather than on a Tuesday, as is customary in the House. We hope the Minister of Finance will include measures in this budget to bring down the cost of living so that rents are more affordable and people can continue to pay their mortgages. I also hope the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons will announce legislative measures to ensure that Canadians can keep their jobs and save money.

I look forward to my hon. government colleague's response.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a historic week here in Ottawa. It culminated in our annual meeting with our friends and cousins from the European Union, with whom we are now developing deeper ties in order to diversify our foreign trade and provide Canadians with prosperity, quality of life and new employment opportunities for future generations.

Concerning the budget, I am not sure whether my esteemed colleague will like it, because it is going to focus on affordability and Canada's competitiveness. We often see that the Conservatives are not always thrilled with Canada's success. That said, we continue to act in a spirit of collaboration and reach out to our Conservative friends.

This afternoon, we will continue the debate at second reading of Bill C-34.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Tomorrow we will call Bill C-41, the medical assistance in dying safeguards act, which was introduced earlier this week.

Monday of next week shall be an opposition day.

[*Translation*]

On Tuesday and Wednesday, we will begin debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-31, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

On Thursday, we will begin debate on Bill S-5, the connected care for Canadians act, and at 4 p.m., as my esteemed colleague mentioned, the Minister of Finance and National Revenue will deliver his budget speech.

* * *

HOUSE OF COMMONS ADMINISTRATION

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons Administration's strategic plan 2027–31.

* * *

[*English*]

ROYAL ASSENT

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall

October 28, 2026

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Ken MacKillop, Deputy of the Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 28th day of October, 2026, at 4:49 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Ryan McAdam

Executive Director

Office of the Secretary to the Governor General.

The bills assented to Wednesday, October 28, 2026, were Bill S-210, an act respecting Ukrainian Heritage Month and Bill C-38, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act, extension of the federal fuel excise tax relief.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

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.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sherbrooke has three minutes and 25 seconds remaining.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was saying that a group of students from the faculty of law at Université de Sherbrooke had drafted a bill setting the minimum age for accessing social media at 16. They drew a parallel with substances such as alcohol and tobacco. Obviously, these substances are comparable not only because they are addictive but also because of their adverse effect on health. This student-led initiative resulted in Bill 796 in Quebec City and received unanimous support when it was introduced in June 2026.

I would also like to highlight the commitment of the Sherbrooke region's school services centre, which has launched a program called “Social Media: Connected, Safe and Legal” to provide parents with resources on cybersecurity, cyber-bullying, and privacy.

This brings me to the concerns that some of my colleagues may have about this bill. Freedom of expression is a known and important concern, but it is fully integrated into the bill we are proposing. Young people under the age of 16 will still be able to express themselves online. The only difference is that they will do so on platforms that are not considered addictive and that will not put them in harm's way. The commission created under this act will also have the authority to exempt services from this minimum age requirement as long as they provide adequate child protection guarantees. My colleague, the member for Outremont, aptly said in her speech last week: “Safety must be a design choice too.”

Canadians want us to take effective action on solving this problem. We should also keep in mind that the digital platforms already apply a default condition that requires users to be at least 13 years of age. This bill would raise that condition only slightly but would produce considerable benefits.

Healthy children are the foundation of a healthy society. Honestly, I fear for the state of our society in the not-too-distant future if we fail to adapt to the forces that are disrupting it. The fact is that Canada is fully capable of responding proactively to the changes brought about by this new digital era. We have a fundamental obligation to today's young people and to future generations.

Everyone gathered here today is already aware of these issues. We know they are gaining momentum, so let us get to work. Let us ensure that our laws keep pace with society's needs. The House sees its share of disagreements, and that is healthy. Debating the issues that Canadians care about and working together to move our great country forward is part of our job description as members of Parliament. When it comes to keeping kids safe, we should all agree on one thing: We have to protect them as much as possible without infringing on their rights. That should be something we can all agree on.

Less than a month from now, on November 20, we will celebrate National Child Day, as we do every year. On this occasion, I will think of all the children, especially our own, and of our great responsibility to them.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to have discussions with my seatmate. I know how important this issue is, and I appreciate that she has consulted with young people.

Bill C-34 would put in, through law, regulations that would protect children across the nation. I see that as a very strong positive. Not only would it provide the opportunity to have regulations for service providers and AI chatbots, but it would also provide the opportunity to institute fines through the establishment of a commission.

I am wondering if my friend could provide her thoughts on how important it is that we bring forward the legislation and ultimately see it pass, because it is all about protecting our children.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, whom I hold in high regard.

The creation of this commission will help ensure that regulations are complied with and that service providers are held to account. This is another step in keeping our children safe.

[*English*]

John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that as legislators, we should be doing everything we need to do to protect children. I do not think anybody in the House would disagree with that. There are concerns, however, which I have been hearing from my constituents and people right across the country, that under section 2(b) of the charter, the potential exists for an infringement of rights and freedoms. That is for privacy rights as well.

When this bill goes to committee, there is going to be a lot of discussion. A lot of witnesses are going to come forward and talk about that. I am wondering if the hon. member has been hearing from her constituents about some of those concerns as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, young people will still be allowed to use social media and other platforms. Bill C-34 will simply make the use of those platforms less harmful to children. We are protecting them by limiting their access to certain content. According to Statistics Canada, one in eight children see content that incites hatred or violence every day without even searching for it, which is why it is so important to move forward with Bill C-34.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a comment and ask a question.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women's last two studies have addressed the issue of social media. When we looked at this issue as part of our study on the rise of masculinism and anti-feminism, witnesses told us that we needed to find a way to better legislate online behaviour, such as cyber-violence.

The committee is currently conducting a study on the disproportionate impact of AI on women. People shared their concerns with us about social media and AI, and they spoke about Bill C-34. This bill may not solve everything.

How will Bill C-34 help with rise of masculinism and anti-feminism and with the disproportionate impact of AI on women and girls?

● (1525)

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Madam Speaker, studies and analyses do indeed show that women are disproportionately affected by everything that happens online. In fact, colleagues in the Pacific region have launched a free program called Face Forward, which was developed by Areto. This initiative protects female members of Parliament by giving them access to all kinds of resources and a network through which they can communicate. An initiative like this is important. However, everything we are proposing in Bill C-34 is also a very good solution.

[*English*]

John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-34 today, a bill that was first introduced back in June. Here we are, almost at the beginning of November, and we are dealing with what I believe to be a consequential piece of legislation that does not come without some concern. It will be good when this bill goes to committee, so that stakeholders, advocates of online safety and those who are concerned about civil liberties and rights can have their say. I expect that it will be a pretty long job for the committee to look at this bill to make sure that what comes back to the House reflects a balance in what should be the ultimate priority for any parliamentarian. I believe that most reasonable-thinking people in this country would agree that the protection of children online is paramount to our role as members of Parliament, as legislators, as those who make the laws.

I know that parents, because I have heard from many in my riding, are concerned about the proliferation of online activity that involves bullying, algorithm effects and content meant to draw in young people, keep them online and keep them engaged for whatever reason. Of course, one of the biggest concerns is individuals who are contacting young people under the guise of being somebody else. They are doing it in many cases to bully them or for nefarious reasons. We have a responsibility to make sure that we are protecting our children. Nobody in this House would disagree with that, but as I said, there are some concerns.

There are some principles we need to be looking at with respect to this. All of us agree that children should not be exposed to sexually explicit content online. Platforms have a responsibility to ensure that children cannot access this type of material. They should be protected from people who seek to exploit or harm them online. Children should also be protected from online content and platform features that contribute to poor mental health outcomes. That was outlined in Bill C-216, which was a private member's bill introduced by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. It was done sincerely and with the intent to protect children online from poor mental health outcomes as a result of the online content that is bombarding young people day in and day out.

I recall that recently, I was in Toronto riding on the subway heading downtown. I was on my phone, as most Canadians are, and I could see the age demographics of the people who were on that train. When we are on a subway, there is nothing better to do than look at our phones, and I saw that everyone was engaged in some sort of online activity. They would have been bombarded with algorithms. They would have been bombarded with content that was meant to keep them engaged.

Platforms should also be held accountable for the swift removal of non-consensually distributed intimate images, including those generated by AI, while taking proactive steps to prevent them from being uploaded in the first place. As colleagues know, I chair the ethics committee. We just recently concluded a study on artificial intelligence and the impact that it is going to have. It went down a dark place involving superintelligence and computers talking to computers. That report, I expect, will be tabled in this House in the next couple of weeks. There were some very significant recommendations the committee made to harness the impact that artificial intelligence is having with respect to what I said earlier: superintelligence, computers talking to computers and how that is going to impact things.

Already, we are seeing online that artificial intelligence is having a huge impact on people's lives. I get phone calls in my office from people asking me whether content online is artificial intelligence or real. My own mom has called me, asking, “Johnny, I just saw this thing on Facebook. Is it true or not?”

● (1530)

It is having a significant impact on overall online activity, but it is also having an impact on what the truth is. Oftentimes, we couch things as misinformation and disinformation. I have said it before and I will say it again: I am old enough to remember when misinformation and disinformation were known as lying. It is a serious problem when these algorithms pick up the content that people are looking at and then, as I said earlier, bombard them with more of this content. Oftentimes, things are not real. Online companies have a responsibility to swiftly remove, especially, the non-consensual intimate images that we have heard so many stories about, with young people's images being put online. When they are online, they are online forever. We need to make sure that we are working as legislators to protect that as well.

Ultimately, parents remain the primary decision-makers. Governments and platforms should support and not replace any parental autonomy when it comes to this stuff. Having four kids, I am often not aware, if at all, of what content they are looking at. They are adults, but it was like that even when they were younger. It seems that every child is getting phones so they can stay in contact with their family. I do not know what the minimum age is, whether it is eight, nine or 10, but what are they looking at?

Parents have an obligation, but we also have an obligation to help parents in that regard. Frankly, parents should be empowered to use the tools they need to protect their children online, whether it is with granting permission or with buttons, whatever the case is and whatever we can come up with. Bill C-34 addresses many concerns in regard to that. We should be giving parents an opportunity to deal with it.

Ultimately, as chair of the access to information, privacy and ethics committee, I know that privacy becomes paramount. We have an institution in this place that is led by the Privacy Commissioner to make sure that privacy is protected. That should be the ultimate goal of what we are trying to do. When this bill gets to committee, I am sure that privacy experts and those who are interested in the protection of privacy will testify.

Canadians have the right to express themselves freely online. Governments and platforms should not restrict lawful speech. There are two sides to this. We are talking about the protection of children, but we are also talking about the protection of the rights and liberties of parents and individuals, even in the case of political discourse, to express themselves freely online without fear of any government involvement, or law enforcement involvement in this case, especially when we are talking about freedoms online. We need to protect, as much as we can, the rights and freedoms of individuals to express themselves freely.

We need to protect children, but that should not be used as an excuse to invoke oversight on law-abiding citizens. That is the hallmark of any free and democratic society. Again, protecting children becomes paramount here.

In conclusion, I will reiterate that as Bill C-34 progresses through today and progresses through committees, it will be vitally important that we protect children online and give parents the tools they need in order to do that, but we cannot do that at the cost of our civil liberties and the rights and freedoms of individuals to express themselves in a law-abiding manner.

● (1535)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments the member put on the record.

I too am very much concerned about things like algorithms. I am very much concerned about the harmful content out there today. That is why Bill C-34 would establish a framework that would see regulations put in place to protect the children of Canada. That is a significant thing. Not only would it put in place regulations or allow for them, but it would also put in place a commission. Through that commission, we could see fines. The bottom line is that there would be more accountability on things like service providers, platforms, AI chatbots and so forth.

Does the member agree with the principle of having a commission to ensure that we see follow-up, a commission that has a high level of expertise on the issue?

John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I think I made it very clear, in the 10 minutes I had, how important it is to protect our children. We also have to make sure that we are not doing that at a cost to civil liberties and rights, especially for law-abiding people, to express themselves online. We have to find that balance. Bill C-34 has a lot more work to do. It will go to committee. We will hear from experts. We will hear from witnesses who are concerned about both sides of the issue. We will certainly hear from child advocates. Of course, we support that.

The other thing is that it is a rapidly changing environment with artificial intelligence, chatbots and everything. My biggest fear is that this legislation will not keep up enough for the changes that are coming. This is certainly something we heard at the ethics committee. We heard how rapidly artificial intelligence is occurring, and we are going to have to be nimble to make sure that we make the changes that are necessary in this rapidly evolving environment of artificial intelligence online.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the bill would defer many important details by delegating responsibility for these matters to the commission it seeks to create, the digital safety commission of Canada, a new federal bureaucracy. A number of contentious issues remain unaddressed in the bill, which seems to set out broad principles, delegating the details to the commission for later consideration.

Does my colleague agree that all potentially contentious issues should be addressed and studied as fully as possible so that the law reflects the legislative intent and so that responsibility is not unduly delegated to officials?

John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. There are many aspects of the bill that concern me, such as the point the hon. member raised. That is why it is very important that, when the bill goes to committee, we have a thorough discussion on everything it contains. Protecting children is very important, but protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals in Canada is what worries me and many other people. We need to discuss that soon.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are many parents who have reached out to a number of MPs. They are very concerned about their ability to protect their children, and they are asking for additional assistance.

Does the member believe that there is a way to balance the rights of individual freedoms so that people are not unfairly targeted for lawful conduct online while parents can be given the tools to protect their children without government intervention?

John Brassard: Madam Speaker, that is the fine balance we have to find. It is about protecting children, which we all want, and then protecting law-abiding people who are expressing their views from a knock on the door by the police telling them they have expressed themselves too much—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I beg members not to use actions such as knocking on the table. It is very disturbing for the interpreters.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mississauga—Malton.

Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, freedom of speech has its place. Let me say that first, because it is where this debate must begin, and nothing in this bill changes it.

The question before us is a different one. How do we use a technology without building a society that is splintered by thought?

We have a society of isolated groups that are increasingly speaking past one another, whose ideas are reinforced whether they are the brightest glimmers of hope that come with the dawn of a new generation or the darkest of thoughts only shared behind a screen through a fictional ID and the clicks of a keyboard. I speak, of course, of social media, and we should make no mistakes about its dangers. Biases are being reinforced. Isolation is increasing. In the space that exists between us, there are those who insert misinformation on purpose.

Social media was meant to be a common space, a space that was created to bring people together, but its very essence is more divisive than it has ever been. Its guardrails are intentionally taken down, and it is increasingly a place of bots and misinformation intentionally injected to create division and chaos. That matters more than ever, because these platforms have become for many Canadians a source of news and information.

I am old enough to remember that, when I was growing up, there was a set number of channels we watched and, in my father's generation, a set of radio stations he would listen to on his morning drives. We were given, within reasonable bounds, a common set of facts we could all agree upon, a shared reality. Today, we live in a world where inconvenient facts can be spun as lies and expedient conjecture can pass for truth. The information we get from search and social media is subject to manipulation and uneven distortions.

When social media was in its early days, there was a great hope that it would become the new public square, a space where people could come together and discuss things freely without fear of retribution or censorship, but what we have seen, when these companies engage in content moderation, or worse distortion, and individuals hide behind fictional identities, is that social media has become less of a public square and more of a space of silos, where hatred is monetized, with little room left for robust public debate. If we, as relatively informed adults, have become so susceptible to lies and conspiracy theories from social media, we should be concerned about the effects on those whose minds are still developing.

Social media companies engage in content moderation. The problem is that the industry standards have fallen. Children are entering the digital world at ever younger ages, often without their parents' knowledge. With a few clicks, a child can open an account on a platform designed to hold their attention, expose them to harm and collect their personal data. The evidence is serious. Youth who experience online victimization report three times the suicide ideation. Over the past decade, depression among Canadians 15 to 24 has doubled, and anxiety has quadrupled. In 2023 alone, police recorded almost 20,000 incidents of online child sexual exploitation. That is a 59% increase in a single year, and a 500% increase since 2014. We can tell parents to monitor more closely, but they are already stretched thin, and no one can watch a child's screen 24 hours a day. No parent can inspect an algorithm.

Here is the heart of the matter. We have laws for when the harm has already happened, but almost nothing that requires platforms to prevent it. If we have learned anything over these last years, it is that we must lower our expectations of what social media companies would do on their own and raise expectations of what government must do in their place. Government regulation must become part of the solution.

Let me say plainly what Bill C-34 does. It creates three duties: a duty to act responsibly, to assess the risks on their own platforms and reduce them by design; a duty to protect children and build age-appropriate safeguards into the product itself; and a duty to make certain content inaccessible, which requires the rapid removal of child sexual exploitation material and intimate images shared without consent, including deepfakes.

The bill would prohibit children under 16 from holding social media accounts. However, it is not a wall without a door. A platform can apply to the new digital safety commission for an exemption if it can demonstrate that its products are safe for children. The ban would give companies a reason to compete on safety, because safety is what opens the door.

● (1545)

AI chatbots would not face an age ban, because they would be bound by the duty to act responsibly and the duty to protect children, and they would need to direct users to intervention services when someone expresses thoughts of suicide or self-harm. Platforms would publish a digital safety plan telling Canadians what risks exist, what they are doing about them and how much harmful content has been flagged. An independent commission of three to five experts would review those plans, assess whether age verification actually works and issue penalties of up to 3% of global revenue for failure. This is lower than Australia, the EU and the U.K.

Let me address the concerns that have been raised, because they deserve a serious answer. Some will say that this would threaten free speech. I take that seriously, which is why I began where I did. Let us look at what this bill would define as harmful: content that sexually victimizes a child; intimate images shared without consent; content that induces a child into self-harm; content used to bully a child; and content that foments extreme hatred, incites violence, or promotes terrorism. These categories are narrow and clearly defined.

This bill would not touch everyday conversation or lawful debate. The commission would have no power to arrest anyone. The bill would place responsibility on the platforms, not on citizens. Some will say this bill invades privacy, but private messaging would be specifically exempt. Data gathered for age verification would be securely collected and swiftly destroyed. The bill would not dictate one method. It would put the onus on platforms to build systems and on the independent commission to judge whether they are adequate.

Others will say this is simply another layer of bureaucracy. I would ask them what the alternative is. Is it leaving it to the companies we have just discussed, or to politicians trading shots across this chamber every time a crisis breaks? The purpose of an expert, independent commission is to take this issue out of political point scoring and replace it with consistent, measured expertise. There are critics who say the commission's details remain unclear. I think that is a fair point. Some respected scholars have called it opaque, and some groups are withholding full support until the regulations are final, but the commission must be independent, and prescribing every decision in statute would undermine that independence.

We are acting quickly, but we intend to get this right. We are not alone. Pediatric hospitals and children's health groups have called this an important step forward. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has called it "a crucial step". Some, like the Phone-Free School Movement, want us to go further. This tells me that the direction is right and that the debate is about how far to go. Canadians are with us, as 77% say we should consider restricting social media for those under 16. That is true of 67% of those aged 18 to 34 and 83% of those 55 and over. It is rare to find a consensus that crosses every generation.

The question is not whether we believe in free expression; we do. The question is whether a space built for connection can once again be worthy of that name, whether our children can grow up with a shared reality, with room for real debate and with protection from those who profit from their harm. We cannot rebuild that common ground in a single bill, but we can lay the foundation for a safer space.

Let us do it. Let us pass Bill C-34.

● (1550)

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just want to get a couple things on the record. I actually surveyed my constituents, and the numbers the member quoted are relatively in line. Just over 60% of constituents in my riding support an age limit being put on children with access to social media, and just over 70% feel that the Government of Canada does need to do more to regulate this space.

I have two questions, though. In Bill C-34, there is no mention of the role of the parent, nor how it would enable them to help protect their children. My colleague, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, has tabled a bill, Bill C-216, that has some good clauses. When Bill C-34 bill gets to committee, does the member think there is something that could be added to it to help give parents more tools?

On the second aspect, the member talked about the expert commission, and I do not disagree with his assertion, but I wonder if he could tell us what the accountability mechanism is for those experts so that they are not buried within the bureaucracy, because, like any human being, nobody is perfect. I am a big believer in government accountability when it comes to laws that impact Canadians right across the spectrum.

Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I really enjoy working with him at committee as well.

As to his questions, I think parenting should be left up to parents. We know that parents have tried, for the last decade-plus, to regulate the social media usage of their children, but we are still seeing problematic behaviours arise. We are still seeing problematic data that shows us that children are struggling with social media use and parents are struggling to regulate their social media use. This bill is meant to bring in government regulation where parents really are being stretched thin.

The second part of the question was in regard to the experts on the commission. I look forward to this being fleshed out in more detail. I am sure that, for the three- to five-member commission, there will be a process in place to pick the best qualified individuals to serve.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member about his thoughts around freedom of expression and some of the criticisms that may have been expressed in this chamber regarding the bill.

Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, freedom of speech is a concept that is fundamentally important to me as a lawyer and as a new member of the Ontario Bar. This bill does not regulate free speech. Free speech is fundamentally protected under our charter.

It does define harmful speech, and I mentioned that in my speech. These categories are narrowly defined and very clearly stated. If there is open, robust debate, that is not something that this bill is targeting.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question. The Bloc Québécois wants this bill to go to committee so we can take a closer look at the commission that the government proposes to establish under this bill. This commission would be responsible for reviewing cases. However, the powers that would be granted to it appear to be quite extensive. It would be able to conduct inspections, summon witnesses and impose administrative penalties. In effect, the government is proposing to pass legislation that sets out principles while delegating all the powers to an administrative body to resolve the most contentious issues.

It is trying to keep the details away from parliamentarians. What real impact will we be able to have in relation to this commission?

[*English*]

Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I think an independent commission is necessary because, as we can see, sometimes with the debate in this chamber, it can get highly politicized. Rather than moving from crisis to crisis, the independent commission could bring measured expertise.

Canadians elected the government on a mandate to protect Canadians, especially young Canadians, whose minds are still developing. I look forward to the work that the commission will eventually do in furthering that work.

● (1555)

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about a sharp rise in anxiety and depression in children. Can he tell the House what he thinks is the major cause of this crisis and what we need to do to identify the causes and potential ways to reverse this crisis?

Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I think the problem really arises because online spaces have become spaces of silos, where whatever beliefs or fears one has get reinforced by the algorithms. One of the ways that we can protect against that is to have an online space but then to come to a real space where we can actually have dialogue and debate.

I look forward to the work that the commission will do to help alleviate problems with the online spaces.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-237, an act respecting a cities and municipalities day.

* * *

[*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.

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Madam Speaker, over the past decade, we have seen an alarming rise in rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm and other mental health challenges among young people. Many parents, educators and health professionals have raised concerns about the role social media may be playing in this trend. Social media has fundamentally changed childhood. While these platforms can help young people connect with friends, learn new things and access information, they can also contribute to sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, loneliness, social comparison and addictive behaviours.

The reality is that many social media platforms are designed to maximize the amount of time users spend online. When platforms offer services for free, it is often because the users themselves have become the product. Their attention is a valuable commodity that companies compete to capture and sell to advertisers. The longer users remain engaged, the more profitable those platforms become. As a result, companies are often competing against one another for our attention and, in some cases, the attention of our children.

Too often, the incentives in the marketplace reward engagement rather than well-being. That is why many Canadians are asking whether more should be done to encourage safer online environments for young people. Children should be protected from products that are intentionally designed to be addictive. I believe social media companies should recognize their responsibility to design services that put the best interests of children first. However, given current business practices and market incentives, many believe legislation may be necessary to encourage different behaviours and different design choices.

Governments have a role to play in creating those incentives and in providing parents with the tools they need to make informed decisions about how their children engage with the online world.

This brings me to Bill C-34, the safe social media act, which is before us today. The legislation would establish new responsibilities for organizations that operate social media platforms, AI-powered chatbots and other online services. For example, regulated social media services would be required to provide users with tools to block and report harmful content as well as with access to support resources. In addition, the legislation would create a new regulator responsible for overseeing compliance and enforcing these requirements.

The bill is built around two key obligations. First, there is a duty to protect children. This includes safety-by-design requirements, age-appropriate design features and measures intended to limit children's exposure to harmful and pornographic content. Second, there is a duty to be transparent. Platforms would be required to maintain records demonstrating compliance and publish a digital safety plan in a clear and accessible format.

The legislation would apply to three categories of regulated services: social media services, including livestreaming and adult content platforms; AI-powered chatbot services, which are treated as a distinct category with their own obligations; and certain other online services, including websites and applications that allow users to interact with them. In short, Bill C-34 seeks to establish a framework for digital safety, transparency and accountability in online spaces.

While I will be supporting the bill to be sent to committee, I have some apprehensions with the legislation. While I will always support the right of parents to control what their children see online and believe they should be given the tools to do so, I take issue with the creation of a new federal bureaucratic department to act as the Internet police. We must be careful that in our effort to make the Internet safer, we do not create a system that places excessive power in the hands of government regulators or imposes burdensome requirements on platforms without delivering meaningful results for Canadian families.

● (1600)

As legislators, we must exercise caution whenever we grant government new powers over what Canadians can see, share or access online. Protecting children is an important objective, but it must not come at the expense of fundamental freedoms. We must ensure that this legislation contains clear safeguards and accountability measures so that it cannot be used to expand government control over online speech or set a precedent for future censorship. This is something Conservatives will continue to champion as this bill moves through the legislation process.

It is also important that we examine real-world examples of similar legislation. In December 2025, Australia implemented a ban on social media access for children under the age of 16. Rather than placing responsibility on parents or young people, the Australian approach focuses on holding social media platforms accountable for enforcing the rules.

Oversight is provided by Australia's eSafety Commissioner, which issues guidance on the measures platforms must take to prevent underage access and has the authority to impose significant financial penalties on companies that fail to comply.

As Parliament studies Bill C-34, we should carefully examine the results of the Australian model. What has been the outcome in Australia and has it been effective? Early evidence suggests there is reason for caution.

In March 2026, the Molly Rose Foundation conducted the first large-scale survey of Australians aged 12 to 15 following the introduction of the social media ban.

The survey found that 61% of young people who previously had accounts on restricted platforms continued to have access to at least one active account. More than half of those who had used platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram remained able to use those services, while 70% of children who continued to access restricted platforms said it was easy to circumvent the ban. The survey also found that 51% of respondents believed the ban had made no difference to their online safety, while 14% reported feeling less safe online. Although some children reported spending less time online, the overall impact on well-being was mixed.

These findings suggest that while the objective of protecting children online is laudable, legislation alone may not be sufficient if young people can easily bypass the restrictions and continue accessing social media platforms.

The Australian experience shows how difficult it is to keep children safe online. In many ways, it is like trying to put toothpaste back in the tube. Technologies move quickly and young people often find ways around restrictions that governments and platforms put in place.

This is why Parliament must take the time to thoroughly study Bill C-34 at committee. We should hear from a broad range of witnesses, including parents, teachers, child advocates, civil liberties advocates, legal experts and those working in the technology sector.

We all agree that children should be protected online, but good intentions alone do not make good policy. Before moving forward, Parliament must ensure the measures proposed are active, effective and practical and that they strike the right balance between protecting children and preserving the rights and freedoms of Canadians.

● (1605)

Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member asked me a question regarding what I thought were the reasons for the rise in anxiety among children, and I said it was because of silos, where fears are reinforced.

I would like to pose the same question to the member about what he thinks the reason is for the rise in anxiety.

Jim Bélanger: Madam Speaker, it goes back to asking what on earth happened to teens in the early 2010s. It was the move from regular phones to smart phones. The rewiring of childhood has interfered with children's social and neurological development. I think that has been the greatest cause for the crisis we are in today.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the bill would establish the digital safety commission of Canada, a new federal bureaucracy that would be entrusted with deciding a number of important and contentious matters. The bill is something of a framework legislation, but it delegates a great deal of authority to that commission.

Does my colleague agree that we will need to examine all of these contentious details very carefully to ensure that the bill truly reflects Parliament's intent and that responsibility is not simply handed over to unelected officials?

Jim Bélanger: Madam Speaker, I completely agree that this matter should be studied thoroughly. Conservatives want to ensure that young people are safe and that platforms are held accountable.

However, many Canadians are concerned about the very broad powers the government wants to grant the proposed commission without sufficient accountability mechanisms. Bill C-34 deserves much closer scrutiny in committee. We need to take the time to study it carefully and ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the CRTC is a great example of a commission that has worked well for Canada.

We would establish a commission that would have the expertise to deal with protecting children in Canada. We would have regulations, and the committee would have ample opportunity to look at ways they can be potentially modified, but the principle of a commission would ensure that there is enforcement and real progress on protecting our children.

Does the member support the principle of the commission?

Jim Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, Conservatives want to make sure kids are kept safe and platforms are held accountable. The concern many Canadians have is that the Liberals would give the proposed commissioner sweeping powers with little accountability. Bill C-34 requires much more scrutiny at committee and needs non-partisan work to get it right.

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his interest in this very important question, namely protecting young people online. I would ask him to speak on a more personal level and tell us about the people in his riding. This is an issue that concerns more than just the members of the House. The protection of children online is a concern for all parents.

Is he, like me, hearing more and more about people's fears regarding the many dangers that now lurk online for young people?

● (1610)

Jim Bélanger: Madam Speaker, yes, that is absolutely the case in my riding. Closer to home, in my family, I have three young people who are parents, and they tell me all the time that what is happening on social media today is very worrisome.

In my grandmother's day, as I was saying, progress took a long time. We went from horse-drawn carriages to the telephone, then to radio, television, and sending a man to the moon. All of these things took a long time. However, today, social media is advancing alarmingly quickly.

[*English*]

Brendan Hanley (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act. We are here to debate what I would suggest all parliamentarians hold as a fundamental and heartfelt responsibility: the safety and well-being of Canadian children. I am speaking not just as an MP but also as a parent and as a former public health physician. Let me begin with the third.

In public health, one of our responsibilities is to identify threats to health, identify the causal or aggravating elements and intervene before preventable harm occurs. We do not wait until a crisis unfolds to take action. Now, for over a decade, pediatricians, emergency doctors and primary care physicians alike have witnessed a troubling trend amongst young people: a surge in rates of anxiety, depression, clinical loneliness, cyber-bullying and even self-harm or suicide.

Children and youth are also spending increasing amounts of time online, exposed to platforms deliberately designed to maximize attention and keep users engaged for as long as possible. These are highly sophisticated systems that personalize content, shape behaviour, and influence emotional well-being in ways that are difficult to navigate, even for adults let alone children.

I am also speaking today as a parent. I am the parent of two young people who have had to navigate this digital frontier. Like so many Canadian parents, including many members of the House, I have seen first-hand how incredibly difficult it is for a developing adolescent brain to pull away from a screen filled with ever-refreshing images, algorithms designed to capture and hold their attention. My children have fortunately managed well, but that siren-like attraction can bring young people to dark places.

The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Mental Health Association and many other medical and health organizations are urging us to pass this bill. “It’s time to put kids over profits”, says the CMA. As an MP, a doctor and a parent, I say we cannot leave families to fight this battle alone. A substantial majority of Canadians support this legislation that would place the responsibility where it belongs: on the platforms that create and profit from these online environments.

[*Translation*]

At the heart of this bill lies a clear legal principle, namely the duty to protect children. This legal obligation applies to all regulated digital services, including social media and regulated chatbot services. Currently, our legislative framework allows web giants to operate reactively, meaning that they moderate content or correct vulnerabilities only after a child has been exposed to harm. Bill C-34 changes that.

It legally requires tech companies to build security, privacy and age-appropriate features directly into the very architecture of their products, right from the design stage. Children's safety will no longer be an optional feature or a hidden setting. Going forward, it will be the baseline legal standard for operating in Canada.

[*English*]

Bill C-34 would introduce strict, age-appropriate design obligations, and this would require developers to explicitly prioritize the safety and developmental needs of users under the age of 18. Just as recommended by the Canadian Paediatric Society, the legislation would directly target the predatory, addictive features designed to capture young minds. A key pillar of the duty to protect children is an obligation to prioritize age-appropriate design, requiring developers to take the interests of users under the age of 18 into account when designing services, including incorporating design features that protect children and create safer online experiences.

The goal of age-appropriate design is simple: to make online environments safer for children, reducing the risk they will encounter harmful content. The legislation intentionally stays at a level where the digital safety commission would be able to work with experts, industry and Canadians to develop appropriate measures through regulations. This regime would ensure that protections remain evidence-based, adaptable and effective.

With Bill C-34, digital services that present high risks to youth would be prohibited from allowing children under the age of 16 to create or own accounts. Learning from experience elsewhere, Canada is pursuing a sophisticated and innovative approach rather than a rigid blanket ban. The bill would utilize an earned exemption model. That is, if a social media platform or digital service can explicitly prove to the digital safety commission that its environment is measurably safe, free from addictive feedback loops and scrubbed of predatory elements, it would be allowed to apply for an exemption. Operating a platform accessible to Canadian children is a privilege that tech companies must earn through proven safety metrics. It is not a default right to exploit data.

● (1615)

We are also taking a decisive stand to protect minors from explicit material. Bill C-34 would mandate that regulated services implement highly secure privacy-preserving age verification or age estimation technologies to ensure that users under the age of 18 cannot access pornographic content in Canada. Let me clarify a point of public debate. This does not mean age-gating the entire Internet for adults, nor would it infringe upon freedom of expression. It simply means placing a reliable digital barrier in front of explicit adult content.

Furthermore, the bill would enforce strict privacy protections on the tech platforms themselves. Any personal data collected to verify a user's age would have to be heavily encrypted, be used strictly for the purpose of age assurance and be permanently deleted immediately after the check is complete.

As a former public health professional, I know we must always look ahead to emerging vectors and be alert for emerging patterns of harm. Social media feeds are no longer the only risk. With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, Canadian youth are spending hours a day interacting with advanced AI chatbots. Children are uniquely vulnerable to these systems, which frequently employ manipulative techniques to encourage deep emotional dependency and unearned trust.

Developers would be required to implement safeguards that identify and address foreseeable risks, prevent the promotion of self-harm or other harmful content and ensure that users are clearly informed when they are interacting with an artificial intelligence system rather than with a human being.

[*Translation*]

The risks associated with AI also require immediate attention. Bill C-34 responds directly to this new reality by imposing a duty to react specifically on chatbots.

The designers of these AI systems will now be legally required to implement rigorous emergency response protocols, systematically block the distribution of content promoting self-harm, and explicitly remind users at all times that they are interacting with a machine, not a human being.

[*English*]

Finally, the legislation would apply a zero tolerance mandate to the most severe forms of online trauma. When content involves the sexual victimization of a child or the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, platforms would not be able to hide behind slow internal review processes. Bill C-34 would legally mandate that tech platforms remove this highly destructive material within 24 hours of its being flagged.

In public health, we should not and do not hesitate to regulate the safety standards of the cars our families ride in, the food our children eat or the toys they play with. It is our long-overdue obligation to ensure that the digital space where our children spend hours every day is likewise comprehensively included. As a parliamentarian, I recognize our legislative duty. As a physician, I recognize our obligation to address a serious and growing public health problem. As a parent, I know how desperately Canadian families are looking for structured and reliable support.

Bill C-34 would give our country the tools to enforce compliance. Platforms that fail to protect our kids would face historic financial penalties of up to 5% of their global revenue. Canada's leading pediatricians, public health experts, and parents agree the status quo is untenable. I urge all members of the House to support the swift passage of the proposed safe social media act so we can finally build a digital world that prioritizes the safety of Canadian children.

● (1620)

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is a very important subject. The member across the way mentioned that there would be highly secure age verification. How would this be done? It is not actually possible right now, as we can see with what has happened in Australia with its policies. He also mentioned that the big tech companies would promise to erase the data they store. How is that possible to regulate? He can understand why we have concerns with the bill.

Brendan Hanley: Madam Speaker, the legislation would set the bar. The actual mechanisms would be determined through the expertise of the commission when it is set and through the regulations. Therefore, the onus would be on the tech companies to provide, for instance, the age verification mechanisms and to work out the details.

Again, the legislation, really, would set the standard and the bar. The onus would be on the tech companies to determine the exact mechanism.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier during my question, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is studying similar issues, and the issue here is not a simple one. It concerns youth and education. These are matters under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage warned the government against the temptation to act alone. As proof, it even made a recommendation to that effect:

> That the Government of Canada, in addressing the effects of influencers and social media on children and adolescents—and while recognizing the jurisdiction and primacy of the provinces in matters relating to social services and youth protection—adopt an asymmetrical and flexible approach.

Why is the government showing up with a bill without having consulted Quebec or the provinces at all, it seems, on an issue that they will eventually have to work and collaborate on together?

Brendan Hanley: Madam Speaker, this legislative effort is being led by the federal government in co-operation with the provinces and territories. The provinces and territories, along with all levels of society, will have a role to play, but with the support provided by this legislation.

[*English*]

Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I did a couple of round tables on the safe social media act in Hamilton and nearby, and some of the most interesting and, frankly, disturbing testimony came from public health officials. I know my hon. colleague already talked a bit about his perspective as a physician, but perhaps he can expound a little more on what family or public health officials are saying about the dangers our youth are facing and the consequences they are seeing among our youth.

Brendan Hanley: Madam Speaker, I have rarely seen such uniformity among not only the public health community but the medical community at large, including the front line. We are hearing from pediatricians and emergency physicians who are seeing the effects. I remember the minister remarking when presenting this legislation that emergency physicians are asking to see more broken bones and fewer broken souls. This speaks to the uniformity of consensus on the public health effects on children. Anxiety, depression, cyber-bullying, even self-harm and suicide are occurring at rates never seen since the promulgation of this social media blitz.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): 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 Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Public Safety; the hon. member for Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Health; the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Aerospace Industry.

[*English*]

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, like many members of Parliament this past summer, I consciously spent some time speaking with residents in my riding about this proposal, which was introduced before the summer recess. The reviews were mixed, I have to say. Some were in favour of it, some opposed, and I will get into some of the reasons for that.

I met with one specific group that stood out to me, and I want to give them a bit of a shout-out. It was a young moms' book club in Uxbridge. There was one very brave dad who also attended this book club, and he was a good sport throughout the entire meeting. I want to thank these young moms from Uxbridge, and one young dad, for taking the time to discuss this issue with me and, in fact, for proactively reaching out to me in the summer to have a discussion. In fact, they got a bit of special treatment because during the book club meeting where we were discussing this Liberal proposal, the leader of the official opposition called me on my cell phone.

Naturally, when the boss calls, I answer. I spoke to him about the issue he was calling me about, and then I said, "I'm here with a group of moms talking about this proposal, Bill C-34. Would you take a minute, on speakerphone, to talk to them and hear what they have to say?" He very kindly agreed to do that. They had a great interaction for about five or 10 minutes with the Leader of the Opposition. They were surprised and quite happy to have the opportunity to advocate their position to the Leader of the Opposition. I think that is a great story about Canadian democracy and how accessible all members of Parliament really try to be.

One thing I think we agree on, moms, dads and Conservative members of Parliament, is that children do seem to be facing challenges online, being exposed to inappropriate content and potentially being exposed to exploitation. Parents, equally, are facing challenges online by trying to parent in a rapidly changing technological environment where children often are better equipped than parents themselves. I only have a one-year-old, but she already picks up my phone and tries to scroll because she sees what we are doing. I am a little worried she has already picked up the bug. Lastly, I think moms, dads and Conservative MPs agree that technology companies need to do better in responding to these potential dangers.

One of the overarching principles in this debate, which I will express now and throughout this debate, whether here or in committee as the bill progresses, is that we need to seek to empower parents, not replace them. We want to put power in the hands of parents, not in the hands of technology companies, and certainly not in the hands of government. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost, from a common-sense point of view, parents know their children better than anyone else. Parents must and do have primary authority and guardianship over their children, and that makes sense because parents love their children and want the best for them. It also makes sense because, increasingly, Canadians do not trust the government. It is not too hard to see why.

Canadians do not trust the Liberals with these issues because they have shown themselves to be untrustworthy. Previous Bill C-63, the online harms act, was a failure. Previous Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act, is a failure. Bill C-9, the so-called Combatting Hate Act, is another failure. It is not clear to me that the proposals the government brings forward really empower parents in any of these situations. They certainly empower a new regulator, but I see more support for that than for empowering the people who are raising children.

I want to point out a few of the flaws that I see in this bill that I hope can be addressed. The first, of course, is this idea of a ban itself. The government has touted a social media ban, but really, when we peel back the pages of this proposal, it is a temporary ban. It is a temporary ban, but one that would impose permanent infringements on Canadians' privacy. The government has said it would move quickly to bring the ban into force, without waiting for the new regulatory body to become fully operational. By the government's own estimates, it would likely take between 12 and 18 months, or more, for the regulatory body to be appointed, pass regulations, make orders or provide guidance.

● (1630)

Imposing the ban before all of that is ready would have serious consequences. There would be no standards for age verification, no privacy review, no exemptions and likely no or little enforcement. Perhaps most obviously to me, it would mean that millions of Canadians would be required to verify their age immediately, even though regulated platforms may later be exempt from age verification. That makes little sense to me.

It is also odd because it is the opposite of the approach taken by the Australian government, which Canada's government has touted as an example for itself. Australia passed its law, and it did not take effect for over a year, so the very things I am talking about, like the establishment of a regulator and the passing of regulation and guidance, could be done before any sort of ban took effect.

This means that services likely to qualify for an exemption, something like YouTube Kids, which provides parents with parental controls, content limits, etc., would not get an exemption for many months or years, if at all, but it would likely be entitled to one anyway.

Moreover, it is not clear to me that this approach would even address the harms it sets out to address, because as I read the bill, it would only prevent the creation of a social media account. It would not prevent access to social media content or the browsing of it. This is an admission the government makes, even in the charter statement. Underage users would still be able to access content that the government says is harmful.

Lastly, a flaw that I see is that the bill is premised on subjecting platforms to regulation based on their number of users. With too small a number of users, we would catch everyone, and with too large a number of users, we may miss people. There is no answer provided by the government to that question.

I also want to talk about one question that has not received enough attention in second reading. In fact, I reviewed the minister's speech and the parliamentary secretary's opening speech, and they did not mention this issue at all. It is the question of whether the proposals in the bill, age verification and a temporary ban, are consistent with the Constitution and are consistent with the charter.

The charter statement, which was submitted late by the government, correctly noted a few charter rights that would be engaged by the bill. The requirement, for example, in the bill to control how and when content is accessible to users obviously engages section 2(b), which guarantees the freedom of expression. I do not think there is any serious argument there that, on its face, the bill would infringe that expression. The question is whether it may be saved or not.

Another issue flagged in the charter statement, correctly, if even limited in its treatment, would be the ability to close a hearing to the public. Obviously, that engages free expression and the open court principle. Age verification and the collecting of personal information engages section 8 of the charter, which protects against unreasonable search and seizure. The commission's proposed ability to compel the production of papers, summon people and enter premises engages sections 7 and 8 also.

These questions have not been answered, and I want to dig into this a little in the remaining time I have. First, as I noted above, the temporary ban would come first. Exemptions and rules would come second. The charter statement does not even address this issue at all. Is it constitutional to subject millions of people to temporary age verification? There is no answer.

Moreover, the charter statement really only considers one side of the issue of expression. It rightly points out that the harmful expression identified in the proposal, things like subjecting people to sexually explicit material, falls far from the core guarantee of freedom of expression. There is no argument from me on that, but it utterly fails to address the inevitable likelihood that other content would be subject to complaints to the regulator and ultimately censorship.

Perhaps most fatally, even if the so-called safeguards, like privacy protections in the bill and exemptions for platforms in the future, would make this bill constitutional, the problem remains that none of those protections would be operational when the bill is passed. That is a fundamental question that the bill does not answer, and the government has not provided an answer either, so I hope we get one.

In closing, I want to give a short message to the moms and to the kids. Social media is not always real life. Someone is not defined by how many likes their Facebook post receives. They are not defined by how awesome the world they built in Minecraft really is, nor are they defined by one mistake they may make on social media. I think that is a lesson that all members of Parliament can take too.

● (1635)

Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to take the member opposite back to his first statement, because it kind of rubbed me the wrong way. I would like to ask him why a dad would have to be very brave to join a book club with a bunch of moms. If he is so afraid to join a book club with a bunch of moms, do we really trust him to ensure that his children are safe online?

Jacob Mantle: Madam Speaker, I hope the member opposite is not impugning a dad who came to listen to his MP and impugning his ability to parent his children, because I think that would be offensive to him.

For the record, I do not believe I said he was scared. I said he was brave, and he was brave. He was brave to be there to speak to his MP and tell his MP what he thought about the issue. If that is funny to the member across the way, I think she should consider her opinions.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, because it has jurisdiction in the area of telecommunications, the federal government may make regulations on social media and digital safety, but this also affects areas under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces in terms of social matters, youth protection and education.

Would my colleague agree that Bill C-34 should have an asymmetrical and flexible approach and that Quebec and the provinces should be consulted?

[*English*]

Jacob Mantle: Madam Speaker, I am always open to consultation with the provinces. I talked about constitutional issues. One, of course, is the division of powers. I am not sure I agree with the member's premise. The Criminal Code is obviously within the purview of the federal government, not the provinces. However, there is nothing that prevents the federal government from consulting with Quebec or any other province on these issues, and I think it should do that.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have raised five teenagers, and one thing I have learned is that telling a teenager they cannot do something does not necessarily mean they will not do it. Sometimes it means they will get a whole lot better at hiding it. That is what worries me about banning social media for kids under 16.

Of course, we want to protect our kids, but we also have to be realistic about how teenagers behave. If they find ways around a ban or end up on platforms that are even harder for parents to monitor, have we made them any safer? I wonder if we could end up making things worse for the kids we are trying to protect. Perhaps my colleague can speak to that.

Jacob Mantle: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question. It raises the issue of the efficacy of this proposal. What we have seen is that there are mixed reviews of efficacy. If we look at the Australia model, which the government touts, a huge number of underage children access social media anyway through VPNs or other means. There is also the issue of the number of users on platforms that would be regulated. There is evidence that children may migrate to smaller platforms that are unregulated.

I think we have to consider whether the bill is achieving the reduction in harms it seeks. On the other hand, through the means it is choosing, is it harming people disproportionately on the other side?

[*Translation*]

Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the member is concerned about the powers of an independent body, what type of monitoring, transparency and parliamentary oversight would he propose?

● (1640)

[*English*]

Jacob Mantle: Madam Speaker, the member points out a big problem with this bill, which is the regulator. It is going to make dozens and dozens of decisions after the bill is passed, and we have no idea what those decisions may be. We had an independent review through the Privacy Commissioner, which this bill would remove. I would think the starting place would be to get back to having the Privacy Commissioner involved in this issue more than now.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will keep this brief and give the member whatever time he has left to restate or add to the arguments he has already made.

Jacob Mantle: Madam Speaker, I would reiterate that many of my colleagues and I agree that there are issues we need to address for the protection of our children. I think we are trying to get to the right balance here, one that seeks to protect children and protect the privacy rights of Canadians, and I hope we get there.

[*Translation*]

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to share the views of my constituents in Trois-Rivières, as well as those of my family. I have two kids aged 16 and 18. My daughter just turned 16 yesterday. They are not affected by the bill, but it was a close call. They are certainly interested in it, though. We have had some lively discussions about it.

As the mother of two teens, I can say that I lost the social media battle a long time ago. Obviously, the pandemic did not make things any easier. My children have both been active on social media for quite some time now. I think that I will bring a practical perspective to the discussion because I have gone through all this myself, and I am still dealing with it every day.

As a mother, I had to find other ways to ensure that my children were using social media safely because I could not necessarily trust the platforms. For me, that means periodically reviewing the content my children have access to, asking questions about what they are looking at and explaining how algorithms push content based on what they click on.

Despite all that, despite the time I have spent every day having these conversations with my kids, they are still among the too many young people today who are living with anxiety or mental health issues. As studies show, there is a link between the use of social media, the content that is generated, the content our kids have access to, and the state of their mental health or anxiety levels. The numbers are getting higher and higher. Young people who experience online victimization report three times more suicidal ideation. That was just in the past year, so there is a real impact. Depression has doubled and anxiety has quadrupled among Canadians aged 15 to 24. These figures show that even supervision, open communication and an understanding of how things work are not enough. Simply keeping a watchful eye on things is not enough.

My children have certainly been affected, as have many other children. I cannot even begin to imagine the pressure this puts on parents who may not be equipped to have these conversations, to provide this guidance, or who do not have the time to keep such a close eye on their kids. Some parents might have one, two or three jobs. As we know, it is difficult.

Our government was elected with a mandate to protect Canadians. Clearly, we are living in a digital world and, as we know, the evidence points to serious and growing mental health challenges among young people. Furthermore, online harm is on the rise. We see this every day, even as parliamentarians. Regardless of our political affiliation, we all receive comments on our social media accounts. Our children are also exposed to this. They are exposed to the same kind of treatment. I believe we have a duty to act. We introduced Bill C-34, the safe social media act, precisely to regulate online activities and better protect our children.

Bill C-34 introduces a duty to act responsibly and regulates certain services, requiring them to assess the risks associated with harmful content. It also establishes a duty to protect children by ensuring that services incorporate age-appropriate safeguards into the design and operation of their platforms and products. Finally, it introduces a duty to make certain content inaccessible to underage users. Obviously, in some cases, this will mean the faster removal of content that victimizes young people, sexual exploitation material and intimate content. We must put frameworks in place.

● (1645)

These things happen every day in schools across Canada and in Quebec. We need to establish a regulatory framework to combat this. Most Canadians believe that the status quo is unacceptable. That is why we are introducing this bill.

I would like to talk about what people told me this summer back home in Trois-Rivières. I had several discussions with stakeholders in the health and education sectors. In fact, yesterday, the Mauricie youth council, a non-partisan council, was here in the House. We are really making sure that we hear young people's opinions.

I had discussions with police representatives who work in schools to combat bullying. We also held round table discussions with students in grades 10 and 11. These discussions allowed us to hear the perspectives of both young people and stakeholders on certain issues. These discussions were insightful, constructive and nuanced, and they demonstrated young people's interest in issues affecting their safety and experiences online. They shared their ideas with us and were very engaged in the discussions.

We began the conversation by asking them whether they felt safe on social media and to rate that feeling on a scale from 1 to 10. What was interesting was that the boys' sense of safety was around 9, while the girls' was between 6 and 7. We then had a discussion about whether this was related to the type of content they are shown or are more likely to be exposed to. That led to a rich and insightful exchange.

Several key findings emerged from those consultations, and I would like to bring them to the attention of the House so they can be taken into account in the important debate before us today.

First, young people agreed that online safety is a shared responsibility. A number of different actors have a role to play. Platforms, of course, bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of young people. We also discussed the ability of platforms to remove harmful or abusive content quickly. That was one of the young people's main concerns.

Users themselves obviously bear a significant share of the responsibility. The young people also said that parents, schools and all levels of government have an important role to play.

What is interesting is that, at the beginning of the conversation, the young people were uncomfortable with the idea of the government getting too involved. However, as we explained the bill and they discussed it amongst themselves and shared their experiences with social media, they began to change their minds. By the end of the conversation, many of them recognized that governments did in fact have a responsibility. They understood that the goal was not to prevent them from using social media before they were 16 but to make the platforms take accountability and create a safe online environment.

We also talked about age. Interestingly, the young people we talked to suggested a gradual approach. For example, they said that if they were allowed to get a job when they were 14 but could not use social media until they were 16, then they would not be able to communicate with their co-workers about their shifts or availability. They really made some interesting points.

In closing, I would simply like to say that our children have the right to a safe online environment and that they deserve to be protected. When children leave the house, we protect them and we want to know who they are with and what they are doing.

We need to give ourselves the necessary tools to protect them the same way when they are online in a virtual environment.

● (1650)

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Madam Speaker, children need real protection online. Is Bill C-34 the best solution? That approach is not working in Australia, for example.

Caroline Desrochers: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for asking her question in French. I appreciate it. That does not mean that we agree, but I am still appreciative.

From what I heard from my children, the Mauricie youth council and stakeholders, I can say that this bill is necessary. It enacts laws like the digital safety act and digital safety commission of Canada act. It creates a new commission. We really want to put the tools in place to achieve our goal of holding the digital platforms to account and ensuring that they do what it takes to protect our children here in Canada.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am accustomed to working with my colleague from Trois-Rivières on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, also known as HUMA. We work well together. We agree on one thing: Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option. She talked about her experience as a mother. As the godmother of a young adult, the aunt of a preteen and a teenager, and the mother of a preschool-age little girl, I see the challenges that come at every age with the use of screens and social media. She also said that the young people she consulted told her that the government has a responsibility in this area. We cannot shift everything over to the education system or foist it on parents.

One of the questions we have relates specifically to the creation of the digital security commission. Is this not, to some extent, a way for the government to sidestep responsibility for the most contentious issues by introducing framework legislation that sets out broad principles ? Our question regarding such a complex issue centres on the “how”. It is when we examine the “how” that the most difficult and controversial issues come up. How will the government be able to take a stance on the most contentious issues if everything is delegated to the digital security commission?

Caroline Desrochers: Madam Speaker, it is true that we have worked together productively at the HUMA committee on a number of issues that have a real impact on people's lives. In my view, the right approach is to establish an independent Canadian commission with both the power to legislate on such cases and the expertise to identify the best way to protect our children and secure the necessary commitments from the platforms. However, if the member has any ideas to put forward to strengthen this aspect, we are ready to listen to them and consider them.

Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the bill provides for financial penalties of up to 3% of a company's global revenue. How will these penalties encourage companies to comply with the law, particularly large multinationals?

● (1655)

Caroline Desrochers: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question from my esteemed colleague. Over the past few months, we have witnessed a number of high-profile disputes involving online platforms. In response, many of these platforms have already begun voluntarily introducing the sort of environment we want for our young people. Financial penalties will certainly be a further asset. However, beyond financial penalties, there is also the question of a platform's liability and reputational damage. We know this now: Our young people are capable of making choices, and they do exercise those choices.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that we are discussing a topic that is on the minds and in the hearts of just about every parent with young children today. Young people want to have access to social media because of social pressure, because their friends have access to social media. Young people want to use Facebook because their friends are on Facebook. Young people have access to social media as early as age six or seven. It is easy to get on social media. A person just has to enter a false date of birth, and that is it, they have a Facebook account. Add to that the complicity of parents who are not able to say no to their children, and it really is easy.

Now it has gotten to the point where, if users type a few certain words into a search engine, they could be taken to websites that they do not necessarily want to see. Children are no exception. There are curious young people out there—kids who want to see everything. As a result, they can find themselves exposed to intimate images or graphic violence, particularly given the growing prevalence of violent material online. Sometimes, if they are watching a video on YouTube, YouTube will subsequently suggest another video that is completely unrelated to the previous one. Why does that happen? We do not know. If a young person does not have a YouTube account, the platform will sometimes suggest videos based on viewing patterns. These might be clips from violent movies, videos of incidents involving the police or who knows what else. The young person is exposed to what others are seeing in their algorithm, and that is truly harmful.

If I sound as though I know a thing or two about this, it is because I spend a great deal of time with my grandchildren. Like many children, they enjoy watching simple videos, funny clips on social media, little Lego-building videos and the like. We let them watch, and then suddenly we hear a scream, as if a monster had just emerged out of nowhere. The algorithm automatically took them somewhere else. As a parent or grandparent, that is the moment when concern sets in and one wonders what the child is watching. One quickly realizes that, despite the safeguards in place, despite being present, and despite the content being displayed on a 55-inch screen, if one gets up to turn off the dining room light, it is no longer the same video when one comes back. That is a significant problem, and it is important that we address it.

I did not survey a youth council, as the member who spoke just before me did, but I have seen first-hand, day after day, just how harmful it can be to leave young people unprotected in front of these major digital platforms. I asked myself what I could do to keep my grandchildren from seeing that kind of content and from ending up there in the first place. I thought there must surely be safeguards or tools available to prevent it. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any. I then began wondering how I could educate them. I started looking into how best to teach kids aged five, six and eight to navigate these issues and use these technologies responsibly.

My colleagues know as well as I do that, even if I found a way to educate them, young people have become more skilled than I am at distracting the adults and watching whatever they want. It is incredible: The youngest is only three years old, but he can turn on the TV and go to YouTube. Now I have to be careful to make sure he cannot get on there. I have a responsibility at home. Once the TV is on, we have to protect children from accessing that kind of content.

We must protect young people who will later become victims themselves, young people who have been lured in by third parties, by people with bad intentions, who, through messages on social media, such as Messenger or any other communication platform out there, will trick them into letting their guard down, even though we have told them not to talk to strangers, not to give out their names, and all those things. Despite all that, there are people who are so skilled that they will manage to get what they want from these young people. Why? It is because young people are impressionable by nature.

● (1700)

Yes, this is worrisome.

How can we stop kids from using social media? When they are four, five or six years old, it is easy. Parents can turn off the TV and stop them from having access to all that. Problem solved. If we take a close look at all the terms and conditions on Facebook or most social media, 12-year-old kids are not even supposed to be there. However, there are not many 12-year-olds who are not on some kind of social media, be it TikTok or some other platform.

How can we stop kids from being kids? That is the big question. Is Bill C-34 the answer? There are some answers in Bill C-34. Does it contain all the answers? I do not know.

Above all, as we venture into this area, we need to be careful not to go too far, because this is the technology of tomorrow. I remember the initial reaction when computers and social media first came along. Our parents and grandparents would ask what we were doing on "the Internets". They would say it was dangerous and that people were selling drugs on there. In the end, I have to say that it has proven far more useful than many of us thought at the time. My parents used to say they would never, ever use it. I remember when people said that every family would one day have a computer. Well, that is not what happened. Every family now has more than one computer. My cellphone is more powerful than the first computer I ever owned. It contains more images than I could ever have stored on 56, or even 50,000, floppy disks. That is the reality. The real issue is what we do with the technology and how we use it. The challenge is figuring out how, as a society, we can protect our children while continuing to benefit from social media and all of its positive aspects, and at the same time succeed in getting rid of all the junk we find on those platforms.

In Quebec, children are no longer allowed to bring their cellphones to school, and we have seen a real improvement. I do not have any statistics to share, but what I am hearing from teachers and from everyone is that there has been a real improvement now that children no longer have access to their phones at school. They are socializing more, talking to each other more and participating in more activities. At lunchtime, they do not stay on the school grounds. I think they are quick to scatter. That is another issue. Anyway, there has to be some control.

Parents play an important role. Any legislation must recognize the role of parents. Parents often feel as though they are at a loss when it comes to how to help their children. We must recognize that they have a role to play. No law will be able to prevent a young person from going somewhere if the parents do not co-operate. I think that is important.

There is also the role of these major social media platforms, these digital giants. They have a role to play. They are the ones who enable this kind of content to be distributed and posted and who make it accessible to young people. They, too, have a responsibility, and I think there are technical ways for them to prevent young people from accessing this content without us necessarily having to give them all our personal data so they can build a massive database.

Imagine if a database of young people with Internet access fell into the hands of people with malicious intent. Protecting young people's privacy is just as important. With this kind of database and the artificial intelligence we see everywhere today, if someone were ever to get their hands on a list of all the young people who visit this kind of site, it could cause serious harm. We have a role to play, and the government has a role to play.

At the same time, the government must not take on the roles of judge, adjudicator and punisher all at once. It must exercise a certain degree of control. We cannot appoint someone to be the czar of communications with children. We need to appoint someone who is genuinely committed to protecting children. Protecting children means safeguarding their data and supporting parents. It means being there to support them, not to make all the decisions for them.

We will study Bill C-34 in committee. That is important. I hope I will have the opportunity to add my views, because I do have some recommendations to offer, based on my experience as a grandpa.

● (1705)

Madeleine Chenette (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages and to the Secretary of State (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague's speech, which neatly summarized all the issues facing parents and grandparents. His willingness to contribute to this bill is clear, and I thank him for that.

With this in mind, what would encourage businesses to comply if we were to remove the financial penalties for non-compliance?

Large companies have a role to play. How can we get them on board to help us get this vital bill passed?

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I did not say that I fully support Bill C-34. I want to be very clear about that. As I said, certain aspects of Bill C-34 are noteworthy. There are provisions that we can support, but other parts concern me, particularly the broad powers being granted to the commission.

The commission would be empowered to do a great number of things that are not specified in the bill and would be determined at a later date without coming back to the House. That is a major concern for me. I therefore cannot answer my colleague's hypothetical question. There are a number of matters in the bill that remain undefined. That, too, is troubling.

That is why the bill must be studied in committee. We need to shed light on those undefined provisions so that we can then take a position on the matter my colleague has raised, as well as on several others. Quite simply, too much remains unclear.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Before I recognize another member, I would like to remind everyone that all remarks should be directed through the Chair.

The hon. member for Montcalm.

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, if I were a bit of a joker, I would ask my colleague to repeat what he heard.

In any case, in a documentary from the early 1980s, if I remember correctly, entitled *Comme en Californie*, a computer whiz tells the interviewer that, one day, human beings would enjoy relationships more in front of a screen than in real life. Now that may be happening.

During a study on AI and the harms of artificial superintelligence at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, psychologists told us that, right now, chatbots can induce psychosis in people, even adults, who had no such symptoms before being in contact with a chatbot. That could take just 72 hours.

Would my colleague agree that the companies that manufacture this type of technology should be liable for the harmful effects and that compensation should be provided when such effects occur?

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I will not repeat what I hear on TV because it would be a little disrespectful, but it was not very pretty. It was a really horrible sound, enough to make me go back to the living room to see what was happening on television. That is all I will say.

Concerning my colleague's question, I think that is a different matter. Where mental health is concerned, I believe that everyone, even the web giants, has a role to play. We cannot allow anyone to manipulate the mental health of another person in any way. We cannot let people who have been manipulated in some way go untreated or without services. This is an important issue made all the worse when young people are involved, because they are even more easily manipulated, and their mental health is more easily affected.

I will say yes to anything that will spare young people problems like this. No matter what is involved, I am ready to give it my careful attention.

● (1710)

[*English*]

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I assume the Liberals are aiming to have some definite outcomes from this bill, but we are lacking definitions. For example, one of the main items they are discussing is online bullying, yet we still do not have an official definition of bullying. We do not even have a definition of the social media they are targeting.

Could my hon. colleague mention how on earth we can measure something when we do not even know the proper definitions to measure it by?

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I am going to pick up on the expression I used earlier. Is making the sound of an animal in heat bullying? It may not necessarily be so. It can give someone a fright. My Bloc Québécois colleague seemed a bit intimidated. This is indeed a very problematic situation. We need to define what constitutes bullying before determining the penalties for bullying.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

[*English*]

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

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I request that it be passed on division, please.

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

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

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I suspect that if you were canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 5:30 p.m. so we can begin private members' hour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOIL HEALTH ACT

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.) moved that Bill S-230, An Act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, 8.2 billion people around the world have something in common. We all rely on the soil, the critical ground beneath our feet, to sustain us.

Globally, scientists estimate that the average soil depth on land is in the order of about only one metre. Of course, it can vary dramatically. Prime agricultural land in Ontario can often have only half a metre to one and a half metres of soil before reaching glacial deposits or bedrock, while some prairie soils can be two to three metres in depth. The life-supporting layer of life on Earth is remarkably shallow. It is extraordinarily valuable, and it is at risk.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations found that 33% of earth's soils are already degraded and over 90% could become degraded by 2050. In Ontario, 68% of Ontario's farmland is at risk of unsustainable soil loss. Like any scarce resource, we need to protect it, conserve it and enhance it, but this can only be done through a coordinated national approach to protecting Canada's soil resources.

That is why Bill S-230, an act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement, is so necessary and so timely. Introduced by Ontario senator Robert Black and passed in the Senate on March 26, Bill S-230 builds on the Senate's agriculture and forestry committee's excellent 2024 report entitled “Critical Ground: Why Soil is Essential to Canada's Economic, Environmental, Human, and Social Health”.

The title says it all. The report describes how this one metre of soil is essential for ecosystem services that enable all plant, animal and human life on earth. It is one metre for water purification and storage, climate and flood regulation, nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, and the provision of food, fibre, fuel and habitat for organisms. I encourage everyone to look it up at SenCanada.ca.

It is a page-turner, a fascinating and thorough examination of soils across Canada, including forest soils and permafrost. It is informed by 153 witnesses, 74 briefs and fact-finding missions with farmers, producers, industry and researchers right across Canada. Someone who is not already fascinated with soil and soil health before they read this report will quickly become an advocate. Canada owes Senator Black a debt of gratitude for his lifetime of leadership in Canadian agriculture, and Parliament owes him a debt of gratitude for championing this legislation.

In the House, we often talk about Canada's food security. We talk about grocery prices, supply chains and our ability to produce and process more food here at home. They are important priorities, especially at a time when international trade uncertainty, rising production costs and extreme weather are placing pressure on Canadian farmers, families and food prices. However, there is another part of our food system that is so foundational and deserves much more attention, and that is the health of the soil that makes agricultural production possible.

Soil provides crops with essential nutrients and water, supports biodiversity, stores carbon and helps agricultural land withstand drought and heavy rainfall. When soil loses its structure, nutrients or organic matter, farmers can face lower productivity and higher costs and are more vulnerable to extreme weather. Those factors translate into higher costs at the grocery store for Canadians.

Restoring degraded soil can take years, even decades. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, restoring soil health, biological activity, carbon content and water-holding capacity can take anywhere between five and 20 years under good management. Fully regenerating the soil can take centuries.

We use the word “generational” in the House quite a bit, and this is a generational issue. We use “vital” a lot in the House as well. What more appropriate word could apply to our soil health? *Vitalis*, meaning life, pertaining to life and necessary for life, captures the essential nature of healthy soils, which are necessary for our environmental, food security, sovereignty and economic needs.

● (1715)

The city of Guelph is home to more than 50 agricultural organizations, industry associations, research institutes and government agencies. That makes us one of Canada's largest agri-food innovation hubs. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, the Arrell Food Institute, Bioenterprise, and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance all call Guelph home. The University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College is ranked number one in Canada and among the top 15 globally, anchoring world-leading soil and agri-food research right here in Ontario.

University initiatives such as Soils At Guelph connect researchers, farmers, industry and government to deliver real-world solutions across climate, crops, biology and water systems. State-of-the-art soil monitoring systems at the Ontario crops research centre in Elora are among the only facilities of their kind in North America, supporting Ontarian and Canadian producers with valuable agricultural data for more than 45 years.

We understand the important relationship among soil health, one health, and agricultural innovation and resilience. Every day, researchers in Guelph and right across Canada seek to make soils, plants and agriculture more resilient, more abundant and more affordable. These findings really matter to farmers, who are working every day to manage input costs, improve productivity and remain competitive, and who are extraordinary champions of soil health and protection.

It is an exciting time. Agriculture is increasingly high-tech. Farmers, producers and ranchers are using technology to protect and restore soil health by making agriculture more precise, efficient and sustainable. Using GPS-guided equipment, satellite imagery, soil sensors, AI and data analytics, farmers can apply water, fertilizer and crop protection products only where they are needed, reducing waste and minimizing impacts on soil and waterways.

New technologies also support practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage and precision nutrient management, which help prevent erosion, build soil organic matter, improve water retention and increase resilience to drought and extreme weather. Together, all these innovations are enabling farmers to produce more food, while preserving the long-term health and productivity of the soil on which agriculture depends and on which we all depend. Understanding soil health is equally important in preparing Canadian agriculture for a changing climate.

In 2021, severe drought in the Prairies contributed to a 37% decline in Canadian wheat production. Healthy soil cannot prevent a drought, but better soil structure and higher organic matter can improve water retention and help agricultural systems become more resilient. Practical soil health solutions benefit both farmers and the environment, and demonstrate that agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability can be complementary. In fact, the long-term success of Canadian agriculture depends on it. Canadian farmers, producers and industry are leading in this respect.

Canada already has tremendous expertise. This bill calls for consolidation, enrichment and evolution of that expertise across the country to ensure that it informs and guides a coordinated, long-term national effort. Our government has already taken an important step toward achieving this goal. On March 26, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced the Government of Canada's commitment to advancing a national agricultural soil health strategy, alongside Senator Black and Alan Kruzel, farmer director at the Soil Conservation Council of Canada, with which the government will partner to develop the strategy.

This builds on the significant work already undertaken by the council, farmers and industry partners across the country who have been working on soil health strategies for years. However, without an overarching federal strategy, as proposed in this bill, we lack the ability to protect and conserve agricultural and forestry soils in this country.

This announcement marked an important step forward for Canadian agriculture: the recognition of soil as a critical national asset that supports the livelihood of Canadian farmers, our food security, agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability. This strategy will be informed through regular engagement with provinces and territories, indigenous agricultural groups, producer organizations, academia and industry, ensuring that regional realities and long-term agricultural priorities are reflected in this development.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada will also work with the Soil Conservation Council of Canada to establish a committee structure and advisory working groups, bringing together expertise in research, knowledge sharing, soil data and incentives to support sustainable agricultural practices. The objective is to build on existing knowledge, strengthen coordination, improve soil health information and support the long-term resilience of Canada's agricultural lands. It demonstrates that the government is already taking steps to advance a national approach to agricultural soil health, building on the momentum created by farmers, researchers, industry partners and Parliament.

● (1720)

The fact that work on a national strategy is already under way does not diminish the importance of this legislation. It reinforces it. The March announcement establishes a commitment to collaboration and action. Bill S-230 would complement that work by establishing a legislative framework with clear responsibilities and reporting requirements to support accountability over the longer term. Together these efforts would provide an opportunity to ensure that protecting and enhancing Canada's agricultural soils remains a national priority for generations to come.

The legislation also aligns with Canada's first national food security strategy announced by the Prime Minister in July. That strategy focuses on increasing grocery competition, expanding food processing in Canada, growing more fruits and vegetables year-round and reducing regulatory barriers. However, if we want Canadian farmers to produce more food, we must also protect the very foundation of our food system by keeping farmland and soils healthy, productive and resilient.

Time is of the essence, and the momentum is strong. That brings me to what Bill S-230 would accomplish. First, the legislation would require a national strategy that recognizes soil as a strategic national asset essential to domestic and international food security. We recognize the strategic importance of our energy resources, critical minerals and transportation infrastructure. Our agricultural soils deserve similar attention, because they sustain our ability to produce food, fibre and fuel. Importantly, the legislation would also connect soil health with agricultural production that is both sustainable and profitable.

Second, Bill S-230 would require measures to improve our understanding of the condition of Canadian soils. That includes examining degradation, compaction, nutrient availability, contamination, carbon content and water-holding capacity. Better information would help identify emerging risks, assess the effectiveness of different practices and guide future research and policy decisions.

Third, the bill would support education, research, technical assistance and knowledge sharing. This means helping farmers access practical information about effective soil management practices while recognizing the importance of indigenous knowledge and stewardship. It would also provide for consideration of a national soil information system to improve how knowledge is collected and shared, which is very important.

Fourth, the strategy would include recommendations concerning a national advocate for soil health, alongside appropriate targets, timelines and resources. This one is essential. These provisions matter, because national priorities need clear objectives and ways to measure progress. The legislation would also recognize diversity in Canada's agricultural regions. What works for a grain producer in Ontario may not be appropriate for a rancher in Alberta or a potato farmer in P.E.I. That is why meaningful consultation is essential.

Finally, Bill S-230 would establish an important accountability mechanism. The national strategy would have to be tabled in Parliament within two years of the legislation's coming into force. The minister would then be required to report on progress within three years after the strategy is tabled, and every three years thereafter. These reports would assess what has been implemented, what results have been achieved and what work remains outstanding.

We have established how urgent this is. Bill S-230 would provide an opportunity to reinforce the progress that has already been made and to support accountability for the years ahead. Our national food security strategy, our agricultural investments that support innovation and our environmental priorities all align. Soil health connects all three.

The work being done across Canada is a testament to what is possible when research, agricultural productivity and environmental stewardship come together. We have an opportunity to build on that progress, because protecting our soils today means protecting Canada's ability to feed itself tomorrow. It means carbon capture in our wetlands. It means healthy forest soils.

Soil health, our food security and sovereignty are not partisan issues. I hope all members of the House will support the bill's referral to committee.

● (1725)

Kurt Holman (London—Fanshawe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with concerns regarding this proposed act and also regarding the recent Liberal cuts to science and research for agriculture.

Yes, the member endorses the bill, but how can she endorse it with the Liberal government's making all these cuts?

Dominique O'Rourke: Mr. Speaker, first I would acknowledge that the original private member's bill came from a member opposite. It is Senator Black who is carrying it forward for an important conversation.

I believe there is a lot of investment currently happening in agriculture research. I think the question is worth a conversation, and I will continue to support agricultural innovation and research in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was so long that we thought she was filibustering. We are accustomed to it. I serve with her on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and I recognize her patience. I was pleased to hear from her today.

One of the things our regions have in common is the academic work done there. The University of Guelph is renowned for its work on soil. The same is true of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Institut de recherche en agriculture et agroalimentaire. In that context, yes, there are collaborations.

For anyone really interested in soil health, would it not have been more appropriate for her to speak out, as my colleague suggested, against the cuts to science and research, and to propose investments in our university research chairs so that more data could be gathered, rather than encroaching on provincial jurisdictions?

● (1730)

Dominique O'Rourke: Mr. Speaker, as we know, many of the studies carried out by the research institutes have been transferred to other research centres in Canada or to university centres. We can talk about the framework in which research can be conducted, but I can assure the House that I will be a champion for agri-food research in Canada.

[*English*]

Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give an opportunity to my colleague from Guelph, which is the epicentre of so much research when it comes to agriculture, to say what it means for her to be the sponsor of this bill in the House.

Dominique O'Rourke: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is a beef farmer, has restored the soil on her property and is an ardent champion of agriculture in Ontario. We talk a lot about the importance of agriculture. There was a lot of battling over who else would be able to speak to second reading of this private member's bill.

I think that when we are in a centre of agricultural excellence, when we are surrounded by farmland and when we understand what this would mean to our food security and our ability to feed the world, we cannot help but be extremely passionate about the topic.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing we know is that most innovation in agriculture is driven by farmers. No one knows their land and their animals better than they do.

The member said in her speech that this can be achieved only through government action, yet we have seen that some of the most incredible innovation, of any field at all in Canada, is in agriculture. Why does she now think it has to be done by the government?

Dominique O'Rourke: Mr. Speaker, it is not that at all, because we are acknowledging the work of the folks who have been doing this work for decades. We are acknowledging the work of universities and researchers. We are identifying what the gap is and a national system that could help coordinate, really supercharge, and have accountability for that.

One hundred and fifty-three witnesses spoke to the Senate's agriculture and forestry committee. This is absolutely about putting farmers, producers and ranchers in the middle of the conversation to see how we can help them and how we can reward them as well for supporting soil health.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, on the day that the bill was introduced, the minister announced that he was going to work with the Soil Conservation Council of Canada to create an agricultural soil health strategy. That is nice, but the council he created includes no representatives from Quebec. Not only is he introducing a bill that encroaches on Quebec's jurisdictions, but there are no Quebeckers to make their voices heard in Ottawa. Is there a problem?

Dominique O'Rourke: Mr. Speaker, misleading people is really quite sad. This is a framework, and all provinces, including Quebec, will have to be consulted. Let us be clear. This is an extremely inclusive bill for producers, industry, researchers, governments and indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to speak in favour of this bill, which comes from Senator Robert Black, who should be commended for the work that he and his team did on developing his soil study, which was released last year. One of the most important parts of this study is that it highlights what Canadian farmers are already doing. Over the last 10 or 11 years, the government has done all it can to mislabel farmers as a problem child, when we know that farmers are doing incredible work. I just want to highlight some of the incredible work they are doing.

The Global Institute for Food Security, out of Saskatoon, did a study a couple of years ago that highlighted the incredible work in conservation and soil health that Canadian farmers are already doing. For example, the carbon footprint of canola grown in Canada is 67% lower than the canola grown anywhere else in the world. A trainload of wheat grown in Canada can go around the world three times before it has the same carbon footprint as wheat grown in Europe. GHG emissions from agriculture in Canada are about 8% of our GHG emissions. If we compare that with the rest of the world, where the average is about 25%, it shows the incredible technology, innovation and advancements that have happened right here in Canada. Lastly, about 95% of Saskatchewan farmers are already using zero till or minimal till.

However, this is where the problem arises with the bill and what the government is claiming it wants to do. It is claiming it wants to highlight soil health and encourage Canadian farmers to do science and innovation, but the initiative I talked about, how 95% of Saskatchewan farmers are already doing minimal or zero till, was developed at the research centre in Indian Head, Saskatchewan. That technology or that type of precision agriculture would not have happened had it not been for the lengthy study and research of our top scientists at Indian Head. That research and science is no longer going to be happening, as the Liberal government has announced.

One of the first things the Liberal government announced after the election in 2025 was that it was going to shut down seven critical research farms and experimental farms right across this country. They include farms in Lacombe, Alberta; Indian Head, Saskatchewan; Swift Current, Saskatchewan; Portage la Prairie, Manitoba; Guelph, Ontario; Quebec City, Quebec; and Nappan, Nova Scotia. In fact, last Friday, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada had the dispersal sale of the beef herd in Nappan, Nova Scotia. One hundred and forty years of critical breeding and forage research has now been lost.

To the member for Guelph, who was talking about the importance of soil health in her speech, I want to highlight that every one of the research centres being shut down by the government was doing soil health research. I find it difficult that Liberal government members are saying how passionate they are about soil health and ensuring that agriculture has the tools it needs, when the first thing the minister and the government did when it came to agriculture was shut down seven critical research centres right across Canada. In fact, more than 50% of the cuts to employees at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada came in science and innovation. More than 70% of the total budget cuts came in science and innovation.

One moment they are saying how important science, innovation and soil health are to Canadian agriculture, but on the other hand, they are dismantling the very foundation of the science, innovation and research that happen in Canada. They are dismantling that, making it extremely difficult for farmers to achieve the goals the Liberal government is setting out.

When it came to those budget cuts, it was not a budget decision; it was a principles and values decision. I want to give a couple of examples, if I may.

Closing these research centres is going to save the government about $200 million over a decade, but we are talking about $700 billion in new deficit spending over the next five years. Here are some things the government did spend money on: for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, over the last five years, $16 million on consulting and management fees; $22 million on beans for women for empowerment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; $20 million on building equitable climate-resilient African bean and insect sectors in Africa; $16 million on leveraging equity and gender-just poultry in Kenya; and $8 million on gender-just, low-carbon rice in Vietnam. It also put $8.5 million into a cricket factory that has now gone bankrupt.

● (1735)

They put $40 million into a prison farm which is millions of dollars over budget, and $8 million to transfer the barn at Rideau Hall into a storage facility. Out of more than $300 million in spending, that funding would have kept these research centres open and operating for a decade. This is not a budget decision, this is a values and priority decision by the government, and there are consequences to that.

Further to talking about how important soil health in food production is in Canada, Ontario, where my colleague who is sponsoring this bill lives, in Guelph, is losing 300 acres of farmland every single day. About nine farm families are being lost every single week. Our focus should be on protecting, or doing all we can to protect, critical and highly productive agriculture land. Yet the government is plowing ahead with a $150-billion high-speed rail, a train that no one will use, that will impact literally hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland and thousands of farmers.

I want to highlight one farmer, Wyatt McWilliams, who was at our agriculture committee a couple of weeks, ago talking about the impact that this is having on his farm, not knowing what the future of a generational farm will be in his Ontario community. What made his testimony so moving is Mr. McWilliams was one of the brothers who started the Hay West initiative in 2002 when western Canada was suffering a devastating drought. Mr. McWilliams got more than 1,000 family farms to donate 60,000 large bales of hay, which was moved across Canada to ensure that farmers in western Canada had feed for their cattle. He was given the Order of Canada for that initiative helping farmers in another part of this country.

However, his reward, for launching that initiative and stepping up when he was needed most, from the current government is it is going to expropriate his farm for the $150-billion high-speed rail that is going to go nowhere. No one is going to ride this.

When the government is again talking about the importance of food security and food sovereignty, how can it make that claim when on one side it is shutting down critical research centres and experimental farms and, on the other side, building a high-speed rail that is going to dissect thousands of farms across Ontario and Quebec? It kind of shows where the government priorities are.

We want to see how important this soil study is, but the government cannot profess to talk about how important this is when its actions are saying something completely different. That is something that we are trying to highlight. It is not that we are against this bill, we are trying to say we are against the hypocrisy of the Liberal government, when it is now saying how important farming is and how important Canadian agriculture is and we know that is simply not the case by the actions that are actually happening.

Now the government is talking about cozying up to the European Union, which could further devastate Canadian agriculture if we somehow have to abide by EU standards when it comes to maximum residue limits, pesticides, crop protection products, hormones or carcass washing. Already we cannot get our beef, pork and wheat into the European Union. Now the government wants to align itself even more with EU standards. An Irish farmer told us at committee a couple of weeks ago that trying to farm in the EU is cruel. Those were her words exactly.

As Conservatives, we certainly support the premise of this bill and again applaud Senator Black for all of his work and for being an incredible champion for Canadian agriculture. We certainly look forward to seeing where this study will go and highlight the incredible work that Canadian farmers are already doing. As Conservatives, we will continue to fight for our farmers to ensure that they have the tools they need to be competitive and economically viable and to continue to grow.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is never easy to rise after the member for Foothills. I hope I will be forgiven if my remarks are not quite as lively as his.

I am nevertheless pleased to take part in this debate because Quebec is a nation recognized internationally for its abundant natural resources. In Abitibi—Témiscamingue, for example, we are known for our water. Thanks to our eskers, we are home to one of the largest sources of pure water anywhere. It is no coincidence that our water has even won international awards. Our predominantly boreal forests form part of one of the largest forest ecosystems on the planet. They sustain our communities. They capture and store immense quantities of carbon. Beneath our feet lie gold and copper, which have made our region renowned for mining.

That said, there is one resource that receives far less attention. It is a resource we do not see because we walk on it every day. I am speaking, of course, about soil. We have plenty of it in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. We are also home to the Institut de recherche en agriculture et en agroalimentaire, or IRAA, at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, known as UQAT. We even have a leading expert on our soils: Vincent Poirier, director of UQAT, whom I would like to acknowledge today.

During his recent appearance before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, Mr. Poirier pointed out just how detrimental the cuts to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's research centres and experimental farms would be, because it is impossible to conduct research without being in the field. He had this to say:

> Soil can't be moved. It's unthinkable to do that. It's also impossible to move climate conditions. We can try our very best, but there's so much complexity involved in the natural environment that I would say it's unrealistic to think that we can recreate everything under controlled conditions.

That is the backdrop against which this bill is being introduced. This bill calls on the government to develop a national strategy to protect, conserve and enhance the health of agricultural soil. Maintaining research funding would have been a good start. We also need to put the bill into context. Right now, we are also dealing with the Alto high-speed rail project, which is going to absolutely destroy some of the best farmland in Quebec and Ontario. No one in the Liberal Party or on either the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities or the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food wants to address the actual consequences of this project, and yet, the Senate is telling us in this bill that we need to protect farmland. Does anyone understand where the Liberals are headed now?

I am forgetting an important point. This bill is yet another federal intrusion into areas of provincial jurisdiction. Once again, the federal government is trying to dictate what the provinces should do, especially since the bill speaks of “consulting” the provinces when, in reality, their consent should be required. Without consent, the answer is no. I think that should be obvious. What is more, Quebec is already taking action and has already made progress in protecting its farmland. It already has a plan for sustainable agriculture that was tabled by the ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food, and I would like to congratulate its new minister on his appointment.

The Act respecting the preservation of agricultural land and agricultural activities and the Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec are also important pillars of soil protection and the preservation of Quebec's agricultural lands. Together, they form the backbone of a comprehensive framework developed and tailored to Quebec's realities.

Incidentally, Alto should also be required to comply with that Quebec legislative framework. I would very much like my Liberal colleagues to confirm that the Alto project will be subject to an assessment of its impact on Quebec's agricultural land and that it will obtain authorization from the Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec. In the interest of getting this right, it seems to me that this project cannot simply sidestep the most basic laws. I imagine Bill C-39 probably already includes provisions that would allow it to do just that. I will not apologize for that aside.

My point, once again, is that Quebec has already taken action. Why, then, does Canada need to adopt this policy? Is it because some provinces are reluctant to act? If certain provinces wish to sacrifice their agricultural land, that is their choice. It is not up to Ottawa to tell them what to do.

Another thing that astonishes me is that, on the very day this bill was introduced, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced that he would be working with the Soil Conservation Council of Canada to develop a national soil strategy. What is even more astonishing, however, is the composition of that organization's board of directors: Not a single Quebecker sits on it.

● (1745)

I will say it again: There are no members from Quebec. In other words, the strategy is being developed by an organization that has no roots in Quebec. They are unfamiliar with Quebec's reality, so how can the minister delegate the development of a strategy that he considers important for Canada to a group that does not, in fact, represent the whole of Canada? This is the most basic of principles.

What also shocks me is that two of the seats are held by people who serve on the boards of Fertilizer Canada and CropLife Canada, two organizations that advocate for the use of pesticides and chemical inputs. That amounts to putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. Pesticides and chemical inputs have a harmful impact on the quality of our soil. Everyone knows that. This shows that, with Bills C-30 and C-31, the government has sided with the pesticide and chemical input companies, as well as giving them a seat at the table. However, it has failed to ensure Quebec is represented.

Instead of investing in and continuing research at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's research centres and experimental farms to discover new plant varieties and new, more regenerative practices, the government is placing even more importance on the chemical inputs and pesticides industry.

That said, when we talk about market diversification, the European Union's presence in Canada over the coming days is a reminder that Europe should be one of the markets we are targeting. However, our pesticide policies are causing Europe to close its doors to many of our agricultural products, precisely because of the use of these pesticides.

In short, this soil strategy and this bill are first and foremost about forcing Canadian provinces to protect their farmland. However, Quebec is already at the forefront in this respect. A few examples of what Quebec is doing include tools like Info-Sols, which provides an overview of Quebec's soils; OGeMOS, a simulation tool for soil management; and Terranimo, a web-based application to assess the risks to agricultural soils. That is not even mentioning the fertilization reference documents and the various pesticide regulations that Quebec has developed.

Today, we are witnessing another attempt by the government to interfere in the jurisdictions of the provinces and Quebec. If Ottawa truly wanted to protect farmland, it would start by asking its members on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to study the Alto project immediately, to better understand its impact on farmland. If we truly want to recognize farmland as a strategic national asset, that begins with a government that refuses to sacrifice its best land in Quebec and Ontario essentially to save an hour of travel time.

In closing, I would like to accept the olive branch extended to me by my colleague from Guelph during questions and comments and simply say this: If she thinks what I am saying is untrue because our interpretations differ, yet she wants the support of the Bloc Québécois, she should try to convince us rather than accuse us of saying falsehoods.

● (1750)

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House in support of Bill S-230, an act respecting the development of a national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement.

In Brome—Missisquoi, the challenges related to soil health are not theoretical. They directly affect our agricultural producers, the water quality of Missisquoi Bay and the Lake Memphremagog watershed, the protection of Lake Brome and Lake Davignon, and the resilience of our communities in the face of climate change. That is why a national soil health strategy is not only relevant, but necessary.

I would like to thank Senator Black for his commitment to this critical issue, as well as the member for Guelph, who is sponsoring this bill in the House. Bill S-230 has played an important role in bringing stakeholders together and advancing the work that will lead to Canada's first-ever national strategy for agricultural soil health.

I also want to thank Canadian farmers, who are leading the way in soil conservation, from cover crops and mapping techniques to no-till and reduced-tillage practices.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the government continues to invest in research, innovation and technology to help farmers continue to reduce their environmental footprint and preserve and improve essential resources like soil, while ensuring the sustainability, competitiveness and growth of their operations. For example, the government's on-farm climate action fund has already helped more than 8,000 Canadian farmers adopt sustainable practices, such as cover cropping, crop rotation and nutrient management, covering nearly three million hectares in Canada.

In my riding of Brome—Missisquoi, many farmers are already committed to this transition. They are using cover crops, improved crop rotation and soil conservation practices that protect both the environment and the profitability of their business. Every day, these farmers demonstrate that it is possible to bring together agricultural productivity and the protection of natural resources, particularly through more efficient management of inputs and by using innovative practices that reflect today's climate realities.

Canada is also a member of the Global Soil Partnership, a forum created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. This partnership aims to facilitate and accelerate the flow of knowledge and technology for the sustainable management of soil resources. Healthy soil is one of our country's most important assets. It determines the future of agriculture in Canada and the economic viability of Canadian farms. The food we eat and our economy depend on it. Soil health is essential to the productivity, competitiveness and long-term resilience of Canada’s agricultural sector.

Healthy soil improves agricultural yields, reduces input costs, regulates diseases and pests and protects against drought, floods and other climate risks. Soil is key to the success of our agriculture and agri-food sectors. It accounts for one in nine jobs, $150 billion of our GDP and over $100 billion in exports.

Globally, soil provides approximately 95% of the world's food supply and performs other essential functions, including filtering and storing water, mitigating climate extremes, sequestering carbon and sustaining biodiversity. However, despite significant investments and the best efforts of our farmers, erosion, urban sprawl and extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, continue to have serious impacts on the health of our soils.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 33% of the world's soils are already degraded and warns that, if no action is taken, more than 90% could be degraded by 2050. That is why the introduction of this bill could not be more timely.

I would like to emphasize that Canadian producers are already using the latest technologies and knowledge to improve productivity, conserve the resources on which they depend and maintain strong incomes, thereby ensuring a viable agricultural sector that feeds Canadians and contributes to the global food supply.

To support them in this essential work and to preserve and enhance soil health for current and future generations, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is working in partnership with the Soil Conservation Council of Canada, commonly known as the SCCC, to develop Canada's first-ever national agricultural soil health strategy.

● (1755)

I would therefore like to thank the SCCC for its leadership on soil health and for its work in developing the national strategy for soil health protection, conservation and enhancement.

The work carried out in the Senate on Bill S-230 has already helped to shape this strategy and advance its implementation. It has played an important role in engaging stakeholders and advancing the work that will lead to Canada's very first national strategy for agricultural soil health.

Since last summer, we have consulted with farmers, academics, researchers, the provinces and territories and other industry representatives. Four expert sub-committees have been established. They are made up of members from private-sector producer associations, academia and government representatives. This autumn, the government will meet with indigenous groups to discuss important issues such as soil health, land management and regional or community priorities. The sub-committees will then draft the content, after which Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the SCCC will finalize the strategy in consultation with all stakeholders.

The strategy would be an important step forward for Canadian agriculture. Overall, it would support the adoption of sustainable practices, improve data collection and strengthen the long-term resiliency of Canada's farmland. Keeping our soil healthy requires a co-operative approach involving all partners. Under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's current policy framework, the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership, the government is working with the provinces and territories to strengthen the competitiveness, innovation and resiliency of the agriculture and agri-food sector. That includes programs such as the resilient agricultural landscape program, which helps farmers conserve and enhance the resiliency of agricultural landscapes through the adoption of on-farm land use and management practices that maximize environmental and societal benefits.

In fact, improving soil health is one of the most effective ways of improving on-farm resilience. Healthy soil improves infiltration and water retention, promotes biodiversity, reduces erosion and helps farmers adapt to climate change, while maintaining their productivity.

As the sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership winds down, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is working on a new strategic framework that will be launched in April 2028.

Many stakeholders took part in the initial consultations that led to the Halifax Statement in July. The statement charts a course for the work ahead, work that will lead to greater innovation and more growth for Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector. Soil health is definitely one of the priorities that have been brought to our attention. To ensure that we have healthy soils for sustainable food production, we must also consider the economic realities facing farms. The environmental measures that farmers adopt on their farms must benefit both the environment and their farming businesses.

I would like to highlight an example where environmental benefits go hand in hand with farm profitability. Nearly 75% of the arable land in western Canada is now farmed using no-till methods. This innovative farming practice leaves crop residue on the soil to reduce erosion and capture carbon in the soil, while allowing farmers to save on input costs, including fuel and labour.

I am confident that the national agricultural soil health strategy will support the growth and resilience of this remarkable industry. Helping farmers protect and improve their most precious assets will help them earn a good living. This support will also ensure sustainable food production, improved biodiversity and cleaner air and water for current and future generations.

Our government will continue to work with partners across Canada, such as the SCCC, to protect our soil as a vital resource, support biodiversity and help drive prosperity for Canadian farmers.

We can and should all get behind this bill.

● (1800)

[*English*]

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is something that I have a great privilege to speak about. It is deeply close to me and deeply personal to me.

I grew up on a farm. I live on a farm. I have had the pleasure of working for 30 years on five different continents, promoting soil health and consulting on soil health and animal genetics. They say that all life on earth comes down to the top six inches of soil we have. This is true. This is something we should not take for granted.

We have seen, through the very poor farming practices we had early on in Canada, that it is very easy to degrade the soil, but it is also possible to regrow the soil, to improve it. There are many things we are doing now that are of great use.

I come from Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is famous for having eight feet of topsoil. We always hear stories about when the settlers came and dug the basements for their houses. They never hit anything but black dirt. That is no longer the case. A lot of that soil was lost in the 1930s or 1920s, when we had a lot of erosion during dry years. Due to plowing and basically the powderization of the soil, we lost a lot of good topsoil.

However, there has also been a lot of great innovation. Think about the topsoils that we had. They were developed over millennia, in partnership with the bison that would come in. Sometimes they would graze heavily and take everything off. They said when the bison left, there was just black dirt; there was no grass left. Sometimes those bison did not come back for two or three years, which gave ample time for the soil to rest and the microbes to regrow. It was like pages in a book. We had soil that would grow grass. The bison would come. They would trample the grass, eat some and leave their dung and urine behind, which would increase the organic matter in the soil. That was like another page. They would do that over and over again. That is how we developed the rich black soils we have today.

That is the same thing that has happened all over the globe. When we look at seasonal grasslands, there are about three billion hectares in the world. We can think of the Prairies, the Eurasian steppe, the savannahs in Africa and the pampas in South America. They all developed exactly the same way. Large groups of herbivores would come in, take about half of what there was, trample the other half and leave their fertilizer behind. That would grow incredible soils.

With the advent of modern agriculture, we decided that we would manage agriculture. We would have cattle in a small fence and would just let them eat whatever they wanted. Animals are lazy. Cows especially are very lazy. They eat what they like, and they leave what they do not like.

By having cattle go back constantly to the same plants they like, they weaken the root systems, which gives an advantage to the grasses they do not like and they soon take over. The cattle do not like those grasses, so they leave them. When they leave them, the plants die. They do not get trampled or eaten, and they are not in contact with the soil, which helps them break down. What happens when the grasses are left standing is that they have to break down by oxidation. That can take years sometimes. When we see two- or three-year-old grass plants in a park, for example, that are silver, that is the oxidation I am talking about. They need soil contact to break down.

We used to do that in agriculture by locking cattle in, say, a 160-acre parcel of land in Saskatchewan. That was typical. We would put them there in the spring, leave them there for the whole year and bring them off in the fall. The animals would eat what they liked and leave what they did not like. That caused a problem in the grasslands. We would see a big space between the plants.

However, we changed that. Canada is a world leader in something called regenerative agriculture, especially when it comes to livestock agriculture. What we have done is used cattle as a proxy for the great bison herds. We do what is called rotational grazing or cell grazing, where we lock animals in a very small, specific area so they have to eat everything there, or at least eat every plant there, hopefully leaving half of them or a little bit more and trampling the rest. Then we move them to other parcels. If we do this management correctly, the grass that was grazed will not get regrazed at all until, perhaps, 60 or, even better, 90 days after that.

● (1805)

This has made huge differences in our soil's capacity to hold water. We are seeing it on my own farm. We used to have small potholes that would fill up in the spring and then the water would go away by June and nothing would really grow there for the rest of the year, and now those potholes do not develop at all because all that water can filtrate into the soil. We are seeing a much healthier water table that way. Also, it keeps the temperature of the soil much cooler.

This is something that was pioneered in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and it has been exported all over the world. I have had the great opportunity to do a lot of this work, particularly in Central Asia. When we look at the great Eurasian steppe of Kazakhstan, Siberia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, that whole area, and Mongolia, there is so much potential because they have had years and years of nomadic herders who built the beautiful soils they have now. However, because of the Soviet system they had to endure with Soviet farms, the Communist farms they had, the management was so poor that they have desertification on a scale that people just cannot imagine.

By using some of these great principles we have developed in Canada, such as rotational grazing, the proper management of moving these animals in the right place, and most importantly, allowing for adequate rest of the grasslands after they have been grazed, they are seeing huge responses. The spacing between plants is getting better. The soil temperature is going down. The organic matter is coming up. Water filtration is improving.

Water filtration is something that is so important, especially in the seasonal grasslands, which are known for not having that much rainfall. It is typical in the regenerative agriculture world for someone to say, "How much rain did you get?" On our farm, we say, "all of it," because we do not have runoff. All of it goes into the soil. All of it is there to keep the soil temperature down in order to grow our plants.

Allan Savory, who is the founder of the Savory Institute, claims that if we were to take half of the world's seasonal grasslands and we were to use proper management, if we were to use rotational grazing as a proxy for these wild herds of herbivores that used to roam, we could bring the carbon levels in the atmosphere down to pre-industrial levels. That is the power of soil health and proper soil management.

This is not a pipe dream. This is something we can do. The health of the soils is extremely important. It is a fact that there is about 2.5 tonnes of carbon in every hectare of grasslands right now. Third party studies in Saskatchewan have already shown that a lot of people are sequestering up to six tonnes of carbon per year in their grassland. By managing it properly, by doing what we do here and exporting that to the world, we can make a huge difference. This is something that I think is so important.

However, I am a little confused by the Liberals promoting this bill so much. I appreciate that they are, but I do not know why they would do something like close the research centres we have in Canada that have promoted, developed and pioneered some of this technology. I think of the Indian Head research centre, which is right next to me in my riding.

A farmer named Jim Halford partnered with Guy Lafond at the research centre, and they were the original pioneers of zero-till technology. That has been exported all over the world, and now we are seeing about 270 million hectares of grain land in the world that is now under zero-till. This was developed, and I am going to take the credit that it was in Saskatchewan, at Indian Head, and was all pioneered at the Indian Head research centre. It costs about $3 million to keep the Indian Head research centre open, yet the government decided it was not worth it. It decided that scientific innovation and agriculture was not worth it, yet it gave $8.2 million to study gender-neutral rice in Vietnam.

I appreciate this bill, but I also want the Liberals to understand that scientific research in Canada is very important, and the world is relying on us for it.

● (1810)

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain, who is a hard act to follow and very informative, for his leadership with respect to soil health. That was just an incredible speech. I do want to thank, as well, Senator Black for bringing this forward in the Senate.

This is an important issue. At the same time, I do want to recognize, as many of the speakers before me today have already put forward, that we are blessed here in Canada to have some of the most incredible farmers, who are the leading innovators, when it comes to soil health, in the world. In my own riding, I am blessed to represent what is likely the most beef producers per capita in eastern Canada. It is hard to compete with some of the ridings out in western Canada, but our farmers take their grasslands, their pastures and their soil health very seriously. I have a number of farmers who are organic farmers who fully incorporate rotational grazing and no-till to make sure that the health of that soil is of the utmost importance.

It is something I personally know. I am blessed to have taken over the family farm back home. I have about 60 acres that we are using for crops that another farmer actually rents out. I do not have the time to do it myself, but that rotational stuff is obvious on a daily basis and yearly basis.

I will continue my speech the next time this comes back to the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): It being 6:13 p.m., the time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here to follow up on a question I asked a few weeks ago in the House specifically around the Liberals' firearms confiscation compensation regime, or the gun grab, and how they are paying back our law-abiding firearms owners.

In particular, I identified, here in the House during question period, the fact that I have a number of constituents who were just notified, not even a month ago, October 1. They received communications from the the Department of Public Safety saying they needed to ship their firearms to the government here in Ottawa, I believe to an address somewhere on Bronson, via Purolator, FedEx or UPS in order to receive compensation for these legal firearms.

However, as I pointed out during my question, they went to all three of these couriers and were told they could not ship these firearms without prior approval. When they ultimately reached out to public safety to say that they were sent this email, this letter, saying they needed to ship these firearms and were being told by the couriers that they would not take them without prior approval, they were met with question marks. They were given case file numbers. I am going to go through some of the specific feedback.

Before I get into that, I want to point out the craziness of some of this. Here is a program that the government put in place for $750-ish million, of which it allocated only $242 million to actually compensating these law-abiding, vetted, licensed and trained firearms owners for confiscating their legal property. The Liberals needed $500 million to administer the bureaucracy around this confiscation regime.

Now we are hearing stories that the whole regime is not even functioning properly. Here are a couple of the points I got directly from constituents.

One constituent noted that the shipping kit was delayed in arriving. It was missing packing material. Purolator refused to ship it. Again, there were issues with the actual reimbursement of the shipping, which is a separate claim or submission that firearms owners have to submit. They were told initially it could take up to 14 days to get the kit, which would have put it after the October 17 cut-off. When it showed up, there was no wrapping paper and no packing adhesive tape, which they were told should all have been in the box. The retail outlet refused to ship it without authorization from its office. It was so confusing that they had no idea how to do it. Luckily, in this first case, the firearm was shipped off.

Another constituent noted contradictory information from the government. At 4 p.m., they received a call with a reference case number. They went to Purolator, and Purolator could not do it. The individual wrote, “Once again the Government of Canada lied to me.”

Another constituent received the wrong shipping address, not even the right postal code, in the email from the public safety department.

I could go on. There are about six or seven more constituents who I am aware of in my riding alone.

In light of all of these examples, and I am sure they are replicated across every riding in Canada, will the government commit to ensuring that law-abiding firearms owners who participated in this Liberal firearms confiscation regime will get their due compensation even if the firearms were received after October 17 due to the shortfalls of the administration of this $500-million program?

● (1815)

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to go straight to the matter, the answer to the question of the hon. member is, yes, they should get the fair compensation to which they are entitled. If they do not, please come to me. We will make sure they do.

I am pleased to respond to the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. He told us that some of his constituents had difficulty returning their firearms. He took this to heart, and I want to thank him for helping his constituents do the right thing.

Today, I want to speak about our government's commitment to strengthening gun control in Canada and our progress in delivering an efficient compensation program to affected firearms owners.

In 2020, following the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history in Portapique, Nova Scotia, where 22 plus one people died, the government took the decision that the significant risk certain firearms pose outweighed any justification for their continued availability within Canada and, hence, banned over 2,000 makes and models. These are firearms that are not appropriate for hunting or sport shooting and exceed safe civilian use.

Additional assault-style firearms were banned in December 2024 and March 2025, totalling approximately 2,500 prohibited firearms. In all fairness, banning these firearms implied a fair compensation for those firearm owners, hence, the compensation program. Now nearing its completion, the government is continuing to successfully collect firearms for compensation. We are delivering this program on time and within the funding envelope approved by Parliament. Since January 2026, close to 100 assault-style firearms have been declared in the compensation program for individual owners and businesses.

More than 40,000 individuals have been turning in their firearms to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, local police services or secure mobile collection units over the past month. In a small number of cases, for example, owners who live very far from an in-person collection location, the program has recently invited them to ship their firearms. While most owners have successfully shipped their firearms, we are indeed aware that others may have faced challenges. In those cases, shipping deadlines have been extended. At any rate, our call centre staff have been and are still available to help resolve any issues participants may face with shipping or any other concerns. For their reference, the number is 1-833-759-4551. We remain committed to supporting owners who declare their firearms so that they can fully participate and receive compensation. Individuals who have had difficulty shipping will be accommodated past the program deadline.

The success of the program for individuals builds on the success of the business program. That program has been able to claim over 61,000 firearms. These businesses continue to ship their firearms and receive fair compensation in return. We are serious about removing assault-style firearms from our streets to limit the devastating effects of firearm violence.

● (1820)

Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, first off, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his personal commitment with respect to the deadline being extended should any legal firearms owners have any issues with shipping. I appreciate that clarification. If I hear from any of my constituents, I will be sure to hold him to it.

I want to correct his speech a bit. He made a comment that many of these 2,000 models of firearms that were banned are not appropriate for hunting and sport shooting. He is completely factually incorrect. I helped review the military's statement of requirements with respect to small arms firearms. There is not a single one, with the exception of one sniper rifle, on the whole list that would ever be used by the military.

Therefore, in closing, I want to ask him the same question I have been asking the Liberal government for six years. Could he define what he means by a "military-style assault rifle"?

Jacques Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, we have left it to experts to determine which firearms are assault rifles. This is not a political matter. It is for experts to decide. Basically, there are firearms that can do massive amounts of damage, as we have seen in mass shootings recently.

No single program in this initiative can tackle the challenge of gun violence alone. As a matter of fact, the government's comprehensive plan to keep Canadians safe from guns also includes, and this is important to mention, strengthening our borders, tougher penalties for smuggling guns, red flag laws and the revocation of licences in cases of intimate partner violence. There is also the gun and gang violence action fund and the building safer communities fund.

With these initiatives, the government is taking concrete steps to make Canada less vulnerable to firearm violence, while being fair to responsible and law-abiding firearms owners.

HEALTH

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to bring a voice to a deep and painful crisis unfolding in the beautiful riding of Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

The people of my riding are being left worse off by the failure of the Liberal government's health care policies. According to the latest census figures, Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay holds the distinction of having the population with the oldest median age of all 343 ridings in Canada. Our seniors who built this country and paid taxes their entire lives make up the very heart of this riding. However, when they need specialized care the most, they are met with empty hallways, locked doors and a complete system collapse.

Just last week, the local medical community in our riding issued a heartbreaking open letter. Because of unworkable and bureaucratic mandates, all three neurologists providing bedside on-call care at the Penticton Regional Hospital tendered their resignation. Let that sink in. Canada's oldest population, facing higher statistical risks for degenerative neurological disorders, strokes and age-related conditions, will soon have zero local neurologists left to cover bedside care.

If a senior in Penticton, Oliver, Osoyoos, Princeton or Keremeos wants a basic checkup because they are deeply concerned about their neurological health, they will now lack a local option. They will be forced to travel hundreds of kilometres while struggling with concerns of degrading neurological health. This is not an isolated case. Across our region, we have watched a concerning wave of ER clinic closures rip through local communities, forcing families to worry about whether they will be able to receive the urgent care they would need in an emergency.

This side of the House continues to demand that the government step up for our aging population. We believe that treating seniors with dignity means ensuring that they have direct local access to specialized medical care. How does this relate to federal policy? The Liberals love to shrug their shoulders and say that health care is provincial, but it is federal red tape and a lack of leadership that are choking the pipeline of new doctors.

Right now, estimates say there may be as many as 13,000 trained medical doctors throughout Canada who are not practising. They cannot get into a two-year residency position. These are fully qualified, brilliant medical professionals. Many of them are Canadians who studied abroad and want nothing more than to work and to alleviate the pressures on frontline staff. However, they are trapped in the web of red tape, unable to practice, while our rural ERs close and our specialists vanish.

Our seniors deserve better than an empty neurology department and closed ER doors. When will the Liberal government commit to a blue seal program to fast-track our 13,000 unaccredited doctors and give the people in my communities the care they desperately need?

● (1825)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be kind. The blue seal program the Conservative Party talks about, at the national level, is just not real. I think there are some people within the Conservative Party who understand that. Maybe some do not.

I used to be the health care critic for the Province of Manitoba. The issue of doctors and the placement of doctors, and so forth, is the responsibility of provinces. The biggest barrier in terms of recognizing doctors is not a federal initiative. Often a federal government can encourage and promote provinces to get doctors recognized. It saddens me when doctors or potential doctors are leaving the province of Manitoba and going to other jurisdictions, even countries such as Australia, where they become doctors but then come back and are not getting recognized. This is a serious issue.

The federal government is doing what it can to promote and encourage things such as mobility across Canada. We need more of that. We need our health care professionals to get better recognition for the skill sets they have. I remember an incident when I went to a furniture store on St. James Street. This happened when I was the health care critic. The province was actually busing pregnant women from Brandon, I believe it was, to the city of Winnipeg because we did not have enough doctors in Brandon to deliver babies. Meanwhile, the guy who was selling me furniture had delivered babies in India for years. He gave me the impression that it was hundreds of babies. He could not get his credentials recognized in Canada.

The provinces play a critical role in the numbers of doctors. The stakeholders we are talking about deal with universities, our professional organizations and provincial governments, working more closely at resolving the issues, such as residency positions in hospitals, and, again, educational facilities.

From a federal government perspective, we not only have had a Prime Minister who has actually made a commitment to preserving the strength of our health care system from a federal perspective, but we are also doing more. To give a specific example, we have now put aside $5 billion for capital health care expansions. For the first time, we are saying that we are going to give x number of dollars for capital so we can get capital expansion strictly with health care.

I, for one, am hoping for things such as some money going toward expanding the number of beds at the Seven Oaks General Hospital. I would like more money invested in research and health care, in particular cancer research out of the Health Sciences Centre. There are incredible people who work there.

The federal government is stepping up. The federal government has stepped up in the past to deal with things such as palliative care and mental health. Yes, we have the Canada Health Act. It is important that we look at ways in which we can support our—

● (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, the response from the government side shows just how out of touch it is with rural and aging communities and with seniors. The Liberals offer more empty promises, and they refuse to answer for the unaccredited medical doctors they brought to Canada, promising them that they would be able to work. Many are from Canada, doctors sitting on the sidelines while our health care system grinds to a halt.

Residents in my riding are not asking for grand lectures. They are asking for an ER clinic they can rely on and a specialist who can see them when they are sick. Too many physicians are sitting on the sidelines. Why will the government not adopt our plan to take immediate action to put them into hospitals when they are needed?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, has the member actually approached the province and said, “There is a federal fund of $5 billion. If there is a project here, what is being done to try to access some of those dollars?” I can tell the member that I have done that.

The member talks about dissing seniors. Let us remember, we have a dental program for seniors, including seniors that are on a fixed income in the member's own riding. Yet the Conservatives vote against that. Dental care is a part of health care. Conservative members should talk to a senior that needs to get dental work done, and they will have a better appreciation of that.

The federal government understands the issue of health care. We are doing what we can to support our national health care system through transfer payments and targets, investing in capital. The federal government is stepping up. The Conservatives need to step up where they can.

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am following up on a question I asked in the spring about an issue called spaceport.

The government awarded a 10-year contract for $200 million to fund a national defence company called Maritime Launch Services through National Defence. One of the egregious factors in this lease is that Maritime Launch Services does not own the land the government is paying for a lease on, but leases it from the Government of Nova Scotia for $13,500 per year. We are paying a $20-million lease on land that the company is leasing for $13,500, which is ridiculous in itself.

Now, my colleagues across the way will say how much value has been added by the development of the site by Maritime Launch Services. That nonsense, of course, is completely defied by the company's financial statements. In June 2025, the company had negative value and its paper assets, before considering any of its liabilities, were only $13 million. Again, that is $13 million, against which we are going to pay $20 million annual rent for the land. It is ridiculous again.

The government had decided to pay this $20 million, but the second most egregious part of it, of course, is that it is paying a year in arrears when they were not even on the land. It is basically a grift, a gift to some of their connected insiders that is beyond what should happen with any responsible government.

Let me read from Maritime Launch Services' actual audited statement from the middle of 2025: “As a result, there is material uncertainty that may cast significant doubt as to whether the Company will have the ability to continue as a going concern.”

It is almost a bankrupt company, and the government decided to give them $20 million from defence, in addition to a $10-million line of credit from none other than Export Development Canada. Now, we have seen Export Development Canada, of course, involved in so many other slush fund operations where the government is throwing Canadian taxpayers' money out the door. We have got a few corporations in here.

Now, what is Maritime Launch Services? Let us look at its role in this. It is really a sandwich organization between renting from one government and getting a big contract from the other government. It is a penny stock, a worthless company on the stock exchange, publicly traded, now doing the government's bidding and getting paid egregious amounts of money for doing next to nothing.

Now, we know there is a whole bunch that has to happen here, as far as spaceport goes, but this is an example of money being thrown out the door. If this is what the government is talking about, about how we spend money in defence procurement more effectively, it is completely wrong. This is a way to throw Canadian taxpayer dollars away, not actually trying to make sure it gets into the pockets of the right people.

No sooner than it put $20 million into an almost bankrupt company than the principal of the company gets the lift from that, the $20 million onto a balance sheet, from five cents a share to 60¢ a share, and he unloaded almost 2 million dollars' worth of his shares. That is a grift, through and through, and the government has to be held to account for it. It is the definition of pump and dump. I will let the government respond to that, and I will continue to push on this. This is not the way any democratically elected responsible government should be acting.

● (1835)

Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question is not whether Canada should invest in a sovereign space launch capability. The question is, rather, how to develop this capability and the role it will play in strengthening Canada's national defence and, indeed, our economic future.

The defence industrial strategy marks a major turning point in how Canada approaches defence procurement, innovation and industrial development. At the heart of this strategy, space launch is clearly defined as a sovereign capability essential to Canada's long-term security and autonomy.

Last year, the Department of National Defence assessed Canadian options for developing a sovereign launch capability. In doing so, DND considered a range of factors, including regulatory readiness, the suitability of various locations, alignment with defence research and development, Canada's launch the north rocket challenge, the ability to launch payloads into orbit and the proximity to military and industrial assets. The objective is straightforward. We want to establish a sovereign launch capability as quickly and effectively as possible to support Canadian industry and avoid unnecessary delays and costs along the way.

We are also committing to reduce our reliance on out-of-country providers as we strengthen Canada's strategic autonomy. That is why our government selected a partnership-based model. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of Canada's commitment to a sovereign space capability is through our partnership with Maritime Launch Services. Canada has secured access to an existing launch site near Canso, Nova Scotia, which I know very well, through a 10-year, $200-million agreement signed in January. The agreement also supports the construction of critical launch infrastructure and essential services required to establish domestic launch capability. We believe this approach will reduce delivery timelines, mitigate risk and provide a more cost-effective path to achieve results.

Beyond its defence and security benefits, the agreement includes contract milestones, reporting requirements and oversight provisions that link continued funding to demonstrated results. At its core, the investment is about strengthening Canada's sovereignty, enhancing defence readiness and building long-term economic opportunity. In fact, the contract requires that at least 90% of these public funds, or $180 million, be spent with Canadian businesses or in Canada. This ensures that the vast majority of funding is invested and reinvested in Canadian workers, Canadian companies, Canadian expertise and Canada's defence industrial base.

The member also raised the question of timing of the lease, the signing date of the contract and the payment of $20 million for the first year of the term, so let me speak about that as well. We took each of these steps for two reasons: first, to accelerate the spaceport's path to fully operational status; and second, to enable the launch the north rocket research and development activities to begin as early as next summer. This project is part of a broad effort to expand our space capabilities in order to support the Canadian Armed Forces and defend Canada. All of this is done while ensuring that Canadians benefit and Canada benefits from economic spinoffs.

I will conclude by saying we are at a moment in time when we want to be not just actively involved in the space industry but leading it. It is investments like the ones I mentioned and the strategy that we have put in place that will enable us to lead the way. We do that with partners, with provinces, municipalities, the private sector and first nations, and that is what this project is all about.

● (1840)

Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answer. The $20 million in arrears, there is no excuse for. There is no Treasury Board Secretariat oversight of how that money was spent. It was spent in the year before the government threw the money out the door and immediately into the pockets of a private sector organization in order to get the ball rolling. It is exactly how government should not be operating, particularly when the people it is giving the money to flush the shares out and put the money in their pockets.

I do not know if it even knows what a share lock-up agreement is, but it is a repetitive pattern, including with everything the government says is in urgency, much like with Lion Electric, which is being investigated by the RCMP this week because of what it did, in exactly the same format of funding the public companies and all of the principals taking the money out when they pump the stock up and running away. When this goes bankrupt, if this goes bankrupt, then the Canadian taxpayers are going to end up holding the bag again.

Will my colleague tell us what is going to happen?

Mike Kelloway: Mr. Speaker, I will say what I believe will happen next. It is that we will effectively be involved and leading the way in the space industry. The question we need to ask is this. Does Canada want to build its own sovereign space launch capability, or does it want to remain dependent on others for access?

Lastly, the member opposite, whom I have a great deal of respect for, talked about Liberal insiders. The municipality of Guysborough supports this; the Liberal insider Premier Tim Houston supports this; and in fact, the co-founder of the modern-day Conservative Party, Peter MacKay, supports this, along with first nations in and around Guysborough County.

We are actively involved in and investing in this. Of course we are, because we believe in Nova Scotia, the people in Nova Scotia, and we believe that we can lead the way in Canso for the rest of Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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