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# House of Commons Debates

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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, January 26, 2026

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

## VACANCY

UNIVERSITY—ROSEDALE

**The Speaker:** It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Ms. Freeland, member for the electoral district of University—Rosedale, by resignation effective Friday, January 9.

Pursuant to paragraph 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

### DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House resumed from October 21, 2025, consideration of the motion that Bill C-228, An Act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act (prior review of treaties by Parliament), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I obviously cannot give the first speech of 2026 without wishing you a happy new year. This will be a very promising year, particularly for Quebec. I think that this will be a very important year in terms of the fate of the Quebec nation. Many of us have just returned from the Parti Québécois's policy convention and we can feel a change in the air.

There was also a palpable buzz at the international level at the beginning of 2026. It began with Donald Trump's invasion of Venezuela, and there was also a speech given at Davos that left quite an impression on people. Will it have a lasting and positive impact? That remains to be seen.

What we are seeing is that the Prime Minister of Canada went first to the Middle East to talk with countries whose concept of human rights and whose economic priorities are sometimes questionable, in my opinion, whether we are talking about Saudi Arabia or Qatar.

Then he went to China. Why go to China if not to sell our soul? It is beyond me. We know what a disastrous impact China has had on the global economy. We know that it takes a very colonial approach to its relations with various countries. It appropriates resources by promising to build infrastructure, but essentially plunders resources in order to appropriate them later. What was Canada doing there? Why did it want to rekindle this relationship? I do not know.

Then the Prime Minister went to Davos. We know where the Prime Minister is coming from. He is part of the great global elite that likes to control the masses and tell them how to think. That is essentially what he reiterated. The global dichotomy has changed. The United States now has a different relationship with Canada because the Prime Minister never followed through on his promises.

• (1110)

The Prime Minister promised to snap his fingers and do something about the tariffs. A year later, relations have never been so frosty. Let me be clear: I have no sympathy for the American president. However, relations with the United States are fundamental. The Prime Minister wants to be able to say that war is coming everywhere, that things have changed and that we must adapt. He even goes so far as to say that if we are not at the table, then we are on the menu. To me, that is a way of provoking our ally to the south, the United States, which is normally our main trading partner. What is Mark Carney up to? Would he have us believe—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member is well aware that members should not be referred to by their first names.

The member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

**Sébastien Lemire:** Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister have us believe that we need to ally ourselves with Europe for a war? Who are we at war with, the United States? We could very well lose everything. The sense of security we enjoy in Canada is clearly directly linked to the United States and our continental approach. That needs to be reflected in our trade relations. A partnership with China risks provoking the United States, likely resulting in surtaxes on our purchases, which the U.S. has been threatening for a year. I think we could all have done without that. It will have an impact on the trade agreements covered by this bill.

*Private Members' Business*

On that note, I want to mention the leadership of the Bloc Québécois, which is trying to bring a little more transparency, a little more democracy, a little more accountability into the picture. Foreign policy and international policy cannot be rooted in emotions. We have seen that too often. We see what Donald Trump is doing and the damage it is causing. It is impacting all of our industries. Instead of constantly looking for solutions, why not strengthen our relations with the United States and many others?

What we do know is that Canada has more than 4,400 international treaties of all kinds. These are treaties, agreements, protocols, conventions and amendment agreements to existing treaties. They impact many aspects of people's lives, like taxation, investments, expropriations, environmental protection, human rights and labour rights. That is what is in these treaties. The Bloc Québécois wants to ensure that these treaties are tabled systematically in the House of Commons and that there is a period of at least 21 days after tabling before they are ratified so that the House has an opportunity to consider them. In the interest of transparency, which is sorely lacking in this government, the Bloc Québécois also wants these documents to be published in the Canada Gazette and on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

As for major treaties, we want to establish an obligation to seek advice from the House before they are ratified, of course, and to consult our civil society through a parliamentary committee, because major treaties affect everyone. We need to ensure that decisions are made and that they are sustainable.

In fact, treaties basically involves five stages. A mandate is created, which goes without saying. However, where does the mandate come from? It would be nice if it came from parliamentarians, given their role as elected representatives of the people. Next come negotiations. I realize that this requires some give and take, but the signing stage is important, and that is where Bill C-228 comes in. It requires that the text be tabled in the House of Commons and that the House, after a study in committee, provide its advice on these treaties.

Major treaties are treaties that require the enactment of an act of parliament, change the government's powers, impose a significant financial obligation, result in changes to Canada's boundaries, impose economic sanctions or transfer jurisdiction to international institutions, affect government jurisdictions or deal with international trade. Before reaching the implementation stage and, of course, the formal ratification stage, these treaties would all be ratified by Parliament. I think that makes sense.

Basically, Bill C-228 will ensure that the ratification process is democratic, so that we are no longer threatened by global events in high finance. It is important to solidify those foundations.

• (1115)

I want to point out that Quebec has also stipulated that the National Assembly must ratify international agreements and decrees. The National Assembly has a role to play here. Bill C-228 follows the example set by Quebec. The same thing exists in most countries in Europe. In the United States, Congress has given itself the mandate to negotiate. In Europe, the European Commission cannot enter into trade negotiations without the authorization of the European Parliament. These kinds of practices are common these days and

considered normal for maintaining the essence of what is known as democracy.

However, this democracy is fragile. The Prime Minister has talked about this, and I agree with him. When we see countries arming themselves more and more, it raises some questions.

We see that the Prime Minister is going to China and opening the door to Chinese EVs. I have an electric vehicle myself, but I would never want to use a Chinese EV. First of all, I have no confidence in how it was manufactured. We know nothing about the traceability of the materials used, where they come from or, more importantly, the human rights that were violated in order to build these vehicles. These EVs may cost \$10,000 or \$20,000 less, but at what cost? I am talking about the lives of the workers, the children, who manufacture these vehicles and about mineral mining and the appropriation of global supply chains for strategic critical minerals. I think we all know that, once a vehicle is manufactured, imported and used, the consumer's data no longer belongs to them. I am talking about travel data, as well as all any conversations that may take place inside the vehicle. I do not trust the Chinese regime at all. When we buy from the United States, we are dealing with companies. When we buy a Chinese product, we are dealing with the Chinese government. For me, this is a real threat to democracy. We have opened the door to an agreement with China to have our data stolen. I think that the Prime Minister is setting an extremely dangerous precedent.

Afterwards, he went to Davos and said that we would be on the menu and that we need to wake up because the world has changed. Then he went to Quebec City and said that it turns out that we all misunderstood what happened 400 years ago, because it was actually the beginning of a partnership. I imagine that English Canadians are now telling themselves that, when their farms were burned down, it was the start of a warm relationship. When their wives were raped, it was perhaps the start of a relationship by blood tie, a friendly relationship. That is the message the Prime Minister delivered last week when he twisted history. I look forward to seeing how this all plays out. In the meantime, if we want things to change the right way and in a democratic fashion, the bill tabled by the Bloc Québécois should be passed by the House.

[English]

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleagues, particularly my colleague from Jonquière, who proposed this piece of legislation and exposed some of the issues that underlie it, which are very important in our world today. He has stressed the importance of international treaties, which are now as important as they have ever been.

[Translation]

I want to reiterate the comments made by my colleagues and thank the member for Jonquière for raising the issues addressed in the bill. Our government is a strong advocate for integrity, transparency and accountability in the treaty-making process.

[English]

However, I assert that the current processes that we use in the House, in our Parliament and in our governments strike a very good balance between, on the one hand, ensuring respect for all the principles we have in the House, including processes that allow the opposition to initiate debate on any given treaty, and on the other hand ensuring the continued functioning of Parliament and timely response to a changing world. Both items are imperative for a well-functioning Canada in a very turbulent world.

• (1120)

The resumption of debate on this bill comes at a very critical time, after we have spent a great deal of time away from the House contemplating global events and our place in them and while we watch a world that changes every day.

Last week in Davos the Prime Minister laid out the challenges we face. We are clear-eyed about the facts. The global order has been ruptured, and Canada's posture and assumptions must change with it. We are also clear-eyed about our priorities. We will remain grounded in Canadian principles and Canadian values while, at the same time, building issue-based coalitions that will drive our economic growth and create opportunities for Canadians.

[Translation]

As Canada diversifies its global partnerships to protect jobs and stimulate economic growth, we cannot afford to have our efforts derailed. We are rapidly diversifying our activities abroad. In just six months, we have signed roughly 12 trade and security agreements on four continents, all of which have been or will be tabled in the House, along with any legislative measures required to ratify them.

[English]

As our speed ramps up and as the world continues to change, we cannot afford to create new burdensome processes in Parliament that would simply result in gridlock that would derail the hard work that is going on to build these new partnerships for Canadians and Canadian businesses. To that end, I share the concerns already raised in the House by the members for Wellington—Halton Hills North and Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga about the impact this bill would have on the work of Parliament and the undue burden, without benefit, that a study for each treaty would create for committee work and for debate in the House.

I would reiterate that it would be without significant value for Canadians. This would be burden without benefit.

At the federal level, the imposition of an obligation to obtain the advice of Parliament for the ratification of all important treaties, as considered in this bill, would weaken the ability of any government to respond to time-sensitive international developments and opportunities and to ensure that we secure benefits from Canada's bilateral and multilateral international partners.

Canadians want action as we face global challenges, and they want that action quickly. They want a responsive government, as has been demonstrated by the Prime Minister. The Bloc Québécois has purported that the bill is, above all, designed to ensure that Parliament has a say in the trade deals that the government is negotiat-

### *Private Members' Business*

ing, but I would emphasize that all such agreements require implementing legislation and follow due process every time they are about to be ratified.

Indeed, at this time, even as we speak, on the Order Paper we have two pieces of implementing legislation on trade deals: one with the U.K., a very important piece of legislation that would ensure Canadian businesses can engage with U.K. counterparts and that Canadian consumers would benefit from that trade; and another one with Indonesia, one of the key economic partners we have in the ASEAN world. It is an important economy that Canada and Canadian businesses need to have access to. As I said, those bills are right now before the House for members' consideration, for debate in this place and for Parliament to speak on.

[Translation]

Most of the Bloc Québécois's public messaging on this bill has referred to a vote on all major treaties, but I would like to point out that there is no reference to a mandatory vote in the text of the bill.

[English]

Nevertheless, under our current Standing Orders agreed to by this Parliament, there are two principal ways that a treaty could be voted on in the House. It is within the right of opposition parties to have an opposition day, and hence a motion, through which a treaty could be debated and discussed if it is important to that party. That would ensure that it comes before the House if it is something that the Bloc Québécois or the Conservative Party wants to debate.

The second way is through a concurrence motion on a committee report. There are many committee reports that do not receive concurrence motions, but an opposition member, in particular, or a government member could decide to move concurrence in a report and have a debate in the House, which takes precedence to any other business of the House.

[Translation]

Other members have already pointed out that the sheer number of treaties tabled in any given parliamentary session would paralyze Parliament and use up the limited number of opposition days. I will instead focus on two related issues: parliamentary autonomy and the current structure, timeline and mechanisms for votes on concurrence debates.

[English]

The bill uses the phrase “within a reasonable timeline” when setting out procedure for committee reporting. The most obvious challenge with this clause is that it is not a defined period. The less obvious challenge is that it fails to recognize the prerogative of standing committees to set their own agendas. This is critical in work that comes before committees. This parliamentary autonomy is an important aspect of our democracy and of parliamentary privilege writ large to take all the necessary time to study the matters that are important to Canadians, with a view to improving the lives of Canadians.

*Private Members' Business*

[Translation]

If we want to preserve this parliamentary autonomy, we also need to recognize that, under this legislation, a committee could choose to never study a treaty. This would have the practical effect of killing a treaty, since the bill would make it illegal to ratify a treaty before such a study has taken place.

[English]

A similar issue arises with the concurrence motion process laid out in the bill even when the study does happen and a report is generated with recommendations and tabled in the House. As we know, concurrence motions cannot be moved until after the government has tabled its response to the report, 120 days on top of the time it takes to do the study itself. This is something that will simply paralyze Parliament.

In closing, I want to say that we value the input of parliamentarians before treaties are made, while they are under discussion and as they approach ratification. We have processes in place to make sure that happens. We want to engage with everyone in the House on these treaties. This bill would not help. It is burden without benefit, and we want to ensure that everyone in the House votes against this bill.

● (1125)

**Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Madam Speaker, former prime minister Stephen Harper established a new policy on the tabling and ratification of treaties through a ministerial statement in 2008. That policy remains in place under the current government.

Under that policy, treaties are tabled in the House of Commons 21 sitting days before ratification by the minister. Treaties that require changes to domestic law go through an additional process before ratification, which is when the enabling legislation has passed in Parliament. This procedure has served Canada well. The Conservative Party supports the practice of ensuring that Parliament is fully informed and consulted before binding action is taken with regard to any major new international treaty. Transparency is something that the Canadian people expect of all of us.

Bill C-228, though, is not about transparency. An act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act regarding the prior review of treaties by Parliament does not increase transparency. Instead, it would restrict the power of the minister. The bill, should it become law, would constrain the royal prerogative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs by requiring a committee review and report back to the House and by requiring the advice of the House before ratification. This would, to put it simply, make it more difficult to ratify treaties. Is that something we want to do? Is that something we should be doing?

I may not be a fan of the policies the government proposes. I may think it is mismanaging the affairs of the country, but I do not question its right to govern as it sees fit. It seems to me this is an attempt to remove that right.

If the bill were to become law, it would impose three requirements on the Minister of Foreign Affairs. First, it would require the minister to table major treaties along with an explanatory note in

the House of Commons prior to ratification. That is already a policy and practice, but the bill would make such a tabling a legal requirement. Second, it would require that a committee of the House of Commons review the treaty and report back to the House prior to ratification. Third, the minister would be required to obtain the advice of the House prior to ratification.

The bill states that a “major treaty” is one that:

- (a) requires for its implementation
  - (i) the enactment of an Act of Parliament,
  - (ii) the conferment of new powers on His Majesty in Right of Canada, or
  - (iii) the imposition of a tax by Parliament;
- (b) imposes a significant direct or conditional financial obligation on Canada;
- (c) concerns the transfer of part of Canada’s territory or any change to Canada’s boundaries;
- (d) requires Canada to impose immediate or conditional economic or military sanctions on a state;
- (e) concerns the territorial jurisdiction of Canada, including its jurisdiction over a maritime area or airspace;
- (f) concerns international trade or investment or Canada’s position in the global economy; or
- (g) concerns Canada’s participation in international institutions, including a transfer of jurisdiction to such institutions.

That covers a lot of territory. We can think of the number of proposed trade deals on the table at this time. We can think of our participation in the various international organizations we are a part of. About the only things that are not major treaties are memoranda of understanding.

This legislation does not seem to take into account the realities of Canada’s place in the world and the complexity and scale of our international agreements. During the past 15 years, over 500 treaties have been signed by the government, which is a rate of more than one treaty tabled per sitting week. The level of oversight proposed by the legislation would require a significant increase in the workload of the House of Commons and its committees. Oversight of treaties would displace other business.

If the bill merely sought to codify the practice and procedure that has been in place in the House since 2008, I would have no problem with supporting it. It is the other aspects of the legislation that concern me, especially that it would add to the workload of our committees.

*Private Members' Business*

We are all aware that resources are limited. We are trying to serve the people of Canada in a cost-effective manner. Every committee I have served on in my more than 10 years in the House has struggled with the limited time available to it. Inevitably, there are topics and studies that many members would like to address that cannot move forward due to the limitations on time and committee resources. Can we, in good conscience, add to that workload? How long does it take to comprehensively examine a treaty, bring together witnesses and discuss its pros and cons? How would such a procedure delay the implementation of the treaty? How would this process be viewed by our international partners, who would see months or perhaps years of negotiation delayed, even after an agreement, by what they would see as unnecessary bureaucracy?

I would not be surprised to find that the bill, if passed, would lessen Canada's standing among the community of nations. We want to be known as a country that is easy to deal with, that can make deals and treaties quickly and that does not get bogged down in the process. We do not want to have a reputation as a nation that cannot make up its mind or that does not stand by its agreements.

I suspect that if this legislation were to pass, it would quickly be seen as the burden it is. In the interest of expediency, committees would, instead of reviewing the treaty, merely rubber-stamp it. They would call no witnesses and have no discussion. In which case, what would be the purpose of passing the legislation before us?

As someone who believes in the historical value of Parliament as the people's voice, I understand the intention behind someone wanting to ensure that the House of Commons would have a say in Canada's treaty process. However, there are some things that are just not practical. There is a difference between providing oversight and micromanagement. Though well intentioned, I think the bill might stray across the line from one to the other.

One of the things we must take into account when considering legislation is how easily it can be implemented. Passing new laws is the easy part; putting them into practice is an entirely different matter. It seems to me that Bill C-228, while it does have some good aspects, is one of those bills that would be easy to pass and extremely difficult to implement. We could pass it. We could also pass a bill to repeal the law of gravity. I think both have about the same likelihood of successful implementation.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, since this is the first time I am rising to speak in 2026, I want to start by wishing you a happy new year. I wish you all the best. May you have good health and may it continue. You know you have my best wishes. I also want to take this opportunity to wish a happy new year to everyone in the beautiful riding of Mirabel, to our local businesses, some of which are going through tough times, and to our community organizations. We have witnessed a show of solidarity. We are all very compassionate. We experienced this sense of community over the holidays, and we hope that it continues. I wish everyone in my riding a happy 2026.

We have a bill before us today that is essentially about democracy. In short, what this bill does is call for more democracy. Barack

Obama used to say that democracy is not self-executing. It depends on us to stand up for it, which is exactly what this bill does. In Canada, members of Parliament have no power when trade agreements are signed. Members do not have a say. In his grandiose speech at the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, the Prime Minister said that if we are not at the table, we are on the menu. Right now, when a trade agreement is signed, every member of the House is on the menu. They are the roast at the dinner. They are lying on the table with an apple in their mouth. They do not have a voice at the table. This bill simply seeks to rectify this situation.

What we are asking for is the systematic tabling of treaties in the House of Commons. That is key. It is simple. We are asking that treaties be tabled in the House of Commons and that there be a requirement to wait 21 days so consultations can take place. That is only three weeks. If the Minister of Finance can wait four months to table a budget, then government members should be able to wait three weeks while the House of Commons is consulted on treaties. We also also asking that the treaties be published in the Canada Gazette. Right now, the government is asking citizens to share their opinions on CUSMA on the Canada Gazette website, but it does not want to publish treaties in the Canada Gazette. That does not make any sense. Finally, for major treaties, we are asking that the government hold a vote in the House of Commons and consult civil society.

When I read the bill, I thought it was quite obvious that this is about a basic democratic process. If someone were to walk down the street and ask people whether they think the House of Commons has a say when it comes to treaties, the answer would almost certainly be yes. In a democracy, no one would believe that the Prime Minister and his gang do all this in secret, that treaties are imposed on us and that we vote only on their implementation. Voters expect a measure of democracy, but when we demand that democracy, what does the government say? The member for Don Valley West said something earlier that will not soon be forgotten. He said that the current situation, where there is no transparency, is a balanced situation. He added, and I quote, that democracy is a burden without benefit. He said that in English.

Our neighbours to the south have a president, Mr. Trump, who is trying to bypass the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate. He is trying to impose conditions on international trade by bypassing elected officials. Meanwhile, Canada has a Prime Minister who can negotiate a treaty without even consulting elected officials once it is finalized. That is surprising, and I do not understand how a member of the House of Commons could oppose a bill like this, especially since the Liberals, including some Liberals from Quebec, keep claiming to be the champions of consultation.

*Private Members' Business*

I do not believe that there was any ill intent, but the member for Thérèse-De Blainville, who is very active on social media, recently posted a video in which she tells people that consultation on trade agreements is extremely important, so much so that she invites her constituents to go to the Canada Gazette website to share their opinions on CUSMA. The member tells them that consultation is so important that they have to go to the Canada Gazette site, but how can a person, an MP, tell us that this is important when the Liberals are going to vote and essentially tell us that their own voices do not matter?

Elected members should be judged by their actions. How can the Liberal members from Quebec be promoting consultation when we know that they will be voting against this bill and basically saying that their voices do not carry any weight in Parliament? I cannot understand that. These people were elected by telling us that the world had changed, that the international trade situation had changed, that democracy was in jeopardy.

• (1135)

However, when given the opportunity to express their views on the new international trade conditions, they say that they prefer to mind their own business, that they will be voting fodder, that they will vote as they are told and that they are not very interested. Meanwhile, they are still telling their constituents to visit the official Canada Gazette website. It is terrible.

The idea of giving MPs the right to vote on negotiating mandates has already been endorsed this year in the area of supply management. We tabled several bills on supply management and we have been explaining to Liberal MPs for a long time that, in the United States, mandates come from the U.S. Congress. We have reached the point where the Americans are giving us lessons in democracy. They will definitely understand if Parliament says that supply management is not on the table, if that mandate comes from Parliament. They will understand that. That is their mentality. They are used to it. I remember that, at the time, the member for Compton—Stanstead, who worked for the then agriculture minister during the previous Parliament, told us that it was pointless, that we did not need supply management legislation, that we would be able to strike it out in another act anyway and that it was useless. Finally, they woke up. They realized that a vote in Parliament might be worth something after all, and that the work done by MPs might have value. In the end, the law was passed, and the negotiating mandate changed. What are elected officials for? We are not just voting fodder.

Right now, we have a situation where cabinet does everything, on its own, in secret. Even Liberal MPs do not know what is going on. A few cabinet ministers know, but Liberal members have no idea what is going on. The Prime Minister makes the rounds; the negotiators are the ones with the executive power, the ones who make all the decisions and issue all the mandates. Ultimately, they send us a treaty and tell us not to amend it or offer our advice, that we are to vote for its ratification. We are presented with a fait accompli, and that is the unacceptable part. It undermines the democratic legitimacy of treaties.

There was a time during Confederation, including the time when Mackenzie King was in power, that the practice was to submit

treaties to Parliament. We have lost that tradition. However, the signing of the Kyoto accord was so important that Jean Chrétien said he would put it to a vote in Parliament as a matter of legitimacy. We are talking about the anti-democratic Jean Chrétien, someone who weaponized the immigration process during the referendum, who tried to influence the CBC and Radio-Canada during the referendum period, who had no qualms about toying with democracy. Even he, however, considered it important for the legitimacy of the Kyoto treaty to put it to a vote in Parliament. That says something. Personally, I think elected officials have a role to play.

The Prime Minister called an election. A fixed date election was already scheduled, but he decided to call an election anyway. The reason was that he needed a new Parliament in order to have a stronger mandate. However, it is currently a minority Parliament, at least for now. How can he come along and say that he needs a Parliament and then sign treaties behind almost everyone's back? Basically, he needs a Parliament as long as members keep their mouths shut, do not give their opinion and do not do any work on the issues.

I invite each and every member here to reconsider their position. By voting against this bill, they are voting for less democracy, less transparency and less accountability. The Liberals said it today: They feel that more democracy is a burden without benefit. I put my face on a poster during the election because I believe in democracy and because I think we have a role to play as members of Parliament.

I commend the member for Jonquière for writing and introducing this bill. It is a deeply democratic bill. I find it difficult to see how any member could vote against it.

• (1140)

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.)** Madam Speaker, first let me welcome everyone and wish them the very best in the new year. We have an exciting time ahead of us; I really and truly believe that.

The number of Canadians, whether in Liberal-held ridings or Conservative-held ridings, who see we are on the right track amazes me. They see that we have a Prime Minister who truly understands and is prepared to meet the times, as well as a government as a whole that is supporting that. All we need to do is look at what has taken place in the last six months or eight months since the last election, which was highlighted this month when the Prime Minister addressed the world at Davos. He gave a very powerful statement that has been recognized not only here in Canada but around the world.

Each and every one of us needs to realize, when it comes to trade, that Canada makes up 0.5% of the world population yet contributes 2.5% to world trade. With the agenda put into place by the Prime Minister and the government, I believe the Prime Minister's plan is working, especially when we take into consideration the other aspects of the plan of building Canada strong.

This is not to sidestep other important issues, and I will get specific about the legislation right away, but I am very proud of the fact that earlier today we announced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. It is a program that is going to put money in the pockets of Canadians, recognizing the importance of the times and affordability.

As we talk a great deal about trade in the House of Commons over the next number of weeks and months, it is also important that we do not forget about other important issues such as affordability and crime. On that note, I was pleased that the leader of the Conservative Party said he wants to co-operate. I look forward to that co-operation, because we did not witness it in December. As members will recall, the Liberals wanted bail reform legislation passed, but it was filibustered by the Conservatives. However, I am hopeful; maybe they have turned the page. We have an agenda on crime, an agenda on trade and an agenda to make sure Canadians can afford groceries and other essentials. We have a Prime Minister who is focused on building a stronger Canada.

What the Bloc is asking for today is that every treaty that the government enters into would have a thorough debate. There is a great deal of effort put into the treaties that Canada signs off on. It is not just something that happens overnight. Someone made reference to the Prime Minister's travels. It is not only the Prime Minister who travels. The Minister of Agriculture was in China representing Canadian farmers' interests. We were able to come up with an agreement with China on some issues that have been very difficult. The holistic approach taken during that particular discussion is good for Canada.

Is the Bloc suggesting that before the Prime Minister went to China we should have had a discussion on the floor of the House of Commons? Do members know how many trade discussions and treaty discussions take place on an annual basis? We are talking about dozens, more than 100, over the last number of years. The House of Commons has barely enough time to get the things that it is debating supported. As it has been pointed out, the opposition has other tools it can use if it wants to focus debate on a specific treaty or on an issue related to a specific country. We call these opposition days. The opportunities are there, and are very real, for opposition members to get more engaged. They should not give the false impression that fingers are snapped and treaties just happen.

There is a great deal of effort put in by members of Parliament who do not have portfolios, as well as by parliamentary secretaries and, of course, ministers, but the greatest ambassador Canada has in making sure we can deliver for Canadians is the Prime Minister of Canada. Never before have we had a proactive prime minister be as aggressive as we have witnessed the current Prime Minister being over the last eight months. Canadians from coast to coast are recognizing that, and we are seeing how important it is.

• (1145)

The parliamentary secretary made reference to Indonesia, Northern Ireland and England. Treaties with those countries are before the House right now, waiting to be debated. Let us have the debate on those pieces of legislation.

However, it goes a lot further than those treaties. The Prime Minister of Canada met with the President of the Philippines, and they

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talked about getting an agreement in 2026. The Prime Minister also had discussions with India about getting an agreement in 2026. That is not to mention the many other countries with which we are not only talking but making agreements happen.

Through these agreements, we are bringing investments to Canada. There are billions of dollars of investment from the Middle East coming into Canada because we have a Prime Minister who understands the importance of jobs and of building a stronger and healthier economy. That is what we are witnessing with our current Prime Minister, that jobs do matter. When we talk about the issue of affordability, jobs are important. The Prime Minister and the government unveiled a program earlier today that is going to deliver money to the pockets of Canadians that will help pay for groceries and those essentials. That is great, but we are also realizing how important it is, in supporting the economy, that we create jobs.

The world is changing. We see that, and we know that. Look at what has happened in the last year between the U.S.A. and Canada. As a government, we have recognized that, whether it is the Prime Minister or any member of Parliament from the Liberal caucus, we are not going to accept just any deal coming from the United States; we are going to get the best deal we can for all Canadians and for all regions of the country. In the interim, we need to expand those trade opportunities, because they build a stronger economy here in Canada and they create jobs. We want to create good, solid jobs for Canadians, which means we have to be proactive on trade.

There was a time when the Conservatives supported trade. I remember that they talked a lot about trade when they were in government. If the Conservatives really believed in trade, as opposed to criticizing the Prime Minister for going out and bringing to Canada investments and trade opportunities for small and large businesses alike, they would be applauding the actions of the Prime Minister, the government and its ministers for taking the initiative and aggressively pursuing trade opportunities that go beyond the United States-Canada border. That is how we build a stronger, healthier Canada and provide the jobs that Canadians want and desire.

We are committed on this side of the House, week after week, to building Canada strong by providing the tools that will make it happen. Trade is a very important aspect of that.

• (1150)

There are plenty of opportunities to debate the treaties. The current bill is something we cannot support, but I would encourage all members to recognize that Canadians, even those in Conservative ridings, want to see support for the government initiatives that we are—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

*Private Members' Business*

**Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to welcome everyone back to this place, including Canadians who are watching at home. I am pleased to rise on our first day back to contribute to this debate on Bill C-228.

[Translation]

I want to start by thanking my hon. Bloc Québécois colleague who introduced this bill.

[English]

The context for this bill is important, because it concerns how we, as parliamentarians, understand our role in relation to international commitments that can bind Canada for decades, shape domestic law, and affect the lives of Canadians in very real ways. It is particularly timely as Canada seeks to forge new relationships during a precarious time in international affairs, development and trade.

Bill C-228 proposes a new statutory framework for parliamentary scrutiny of treaties before ratification. It would require treaties to be formally tabled here in Parliament, along with an explanatory memorandum, before Canada can ratify them. It would establish a mandatory waiting period of at least 21 sitting days between tabling and ratification. It would define major treaties and require them to receive additional review and advice from our committees. It would also impose additional transparency obligations, including publication of treaties and related documents, while allowing for limited exceptions in urgent or exceptional circumstances provided that Parliament is informed afterwards.

These are significant proposals, and they raise important questions about balance: balance between efficiency and accountability, balance between executive authority and parliamentary oversight, and balance between Canada's need to act decisively on the world stage and Parliament's responsibility to scrutinize commitments made in Canada's name before they happen.

One strength of this bill is its attempt to bring clarity and consistency to a process that often feels opaque. Canada's current treaty policy, enacted in 2008 and updated in 2020, requires that treaties be tabled not before signature but only before ratification. This policy provides some visibility to the House but little formal influence. Ultimate authority remains with the Prime Minister and cabinet. This policy is known as the Ponsonby rule, and it was adopted from the U.K., where it has been in place since 1924. It was codified there into a law not dissimilar to this bill by the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010.

The information provided here when treaties are tabled varies, and the opportunities for meaningful debate are often limited by time or by competing priorities here in the House. Our current process does not provide Parliament with much of a say, let alone a veto. The executive branch, through the Prime Minister and cabinet, retains authority to make, really, all the decisions. The goal of giving Parliament a chance to have more input and debate is therefore worthy. Transparency is not an abstract principle in the world we currently live in. It is the foundation of democratic consent, particularly when treaties affect domestic law, public spending or regulatory authority.

This really matters at a time when many Canadians feel the government is very far away and makes decisions without consulting them, and where some treaties are seen as limiting our sovereignty. Transparency builds trust, and trust is essential to governance. We seek to ensure that parliamentarians, and by extension Canadians, are not simply presented with a *fait accompli*.

This bill tries to distinguish between routine agreements and those that are truly consequential. This reflects a common-sense idea. The more significant the commitment, the more rigorous the scrutiny should be, but the way "major treaty" is currently defined in this bill is so broad that it risks capturing nearly every treaty Canada enters into, along with amendments. At the same time, it excludes memorandums of understanding, which can have huge consequences for Canada despite not being classified as treaties under the bill.

All of that having been said, the bill should not be dismissed out of hand. There is value in examining whether current practice reflects modern expectations of privacy and accountability. Codifying aspects of existing practice, as the U.K. has done, is not radical. Bill C-228 is well intentioned. It reflects a genuine desire to strengthen democratic oversight and public confidence in Canada's treaty process. As drafted, however, it raises real concerns about feasibility and balance.

I look forward to continuing this debate when time permits.

• (1155)

[Translation]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member for Jonquière for his right of reply.

**Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Madam Speaker, today's debate has been extremely interesting. Bill C-228 is an opportunity for the Prime Minister to put words into action.

Like many, I was captivated by the Prime Minister's speech in Davos for a number of reasons. First of all, among all the wonderful things I have read in my lifetime are the works of Jan Patočka, the person who inspired Václav Havel, a leading Czech philosopher and author of the book *The Power of the Powerless*. I was fascinated to see the Prime Minister quote him.

What the Prime Minister said in Davos was that the power rivalry often causes great powers to forget their duty to middle powers and that carefully calculated interests often rule the day when it comes to international relations.

I thought this was interesting because we can follow Prime Minister's lead and draw our own analogy. Instead of talking about international powers, let us talk about the federation. In the Canadian federation, it is often carefully calculated interests that drive policy and our trade agreements. Perhaps to the Prime Minister's great misfortune, Canada is not a unitary country. Within Canada, there are national minorities, such as Quebec, that are trying to defend their own economies.

I want to come back to the Prime Minister's speech. Speaking about the supposedly rules-based international order, the Prime Minister said that the strongest too often exempt themselves when convenient and that trade rules are enforced asymmetrically.

The Canadian government often exempts itself when convenient. In the current tariff crisis, I have never seen the government take concerted or significant action on the infamous softwood lumber issue. I have also never seen the government seriously address the issue of the tariffs on aluminum. Softwood lumber and aluminum are the two main economic sectors currently subject to tariffs, and they are economic sectors specific to Quebec.

I was elected in 2019 during the negotiation of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, or CUSMA. We soon realized what the government had done. It had forgotten to protect aluminum. We were caught off-guard, and our political party had to fight hard to get protection for aluminum.

In his speech, the Prime Minister talked about living in truth, which is what Václav Havel wrote about in *The Power of the Powerless*. We need to stop living within a lie. The Prime Minister said, "You cannot live within the lie of mutual benefit through integration when integration becomes the source of your subordination".

What we are seeing here, regarding international treaties, is Quebec's subordination to federal power. I will not repeat the examples of the softwood lumber and aluminum sectors, but it is a reality. This bill calls for more consultation with members of Parliament and a mechanism that allows us to study these treaties in committee.

I was shocked to hear my colleague from Don Valley West say that strengthening our democratic processes would be a waste of time. I heard the Prime Minister's speech in Davos, where he said that we must clearly assert the values and rules governing international trade. Then, the Liberals come here and say that the democratic processes that enable us to assert the rules and potentially hear all sides are a waste of time.

Earlier, my Conservative colleague from Edmonton Manning said that this would significantly increase our workload. His leader spends his time saying that Liberal and Bloc Québécois MPs are lazy because they are not willing to do committee work at the discretion of the leader of the official opposition. However, when it comes to studying something as important as an international treaty, his MP says that it would add too much to our workload. In my opinion, these are considerations are erroneous, and MPs should have read the bill in its entirety.

● (1200)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** The member's time is up.

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The question is on the motion.

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

**Mario Simard:** Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, January 28, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

\* \* \*

[English]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

**Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to designate Tuesday, January 27, as an allotted day.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### PROTECTING VICTIMS ACT

**Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.)** moved that Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is an honour to commence debate on Bill C-16. Before I begin, I want to wish everyone a happy new year. I hope everyone had a restful holiday. It is wonderful to see folks from all parties back to debate some of the most important issues facing Canadians.

Before I begin with the specifics of the bill we are here to debate today, I want to spend a moment placing the bill in the appropriate context. It is one in which public safety has become a major priority for Canadians and, indeed, a major priority for the Government of Canada. The feedback we received over the course of the election campaign and since from Canadians is demanding action from the federal government when it comes to these pressing political priorities and safety imperatives.

*Government Orders*

Though the focus of the bill is fairly narrow concerning its impact on particular issues of gender-based violence and the exploitation of children, it is essential to understand that the bill is part of a broader strategy of public safety and criminal justice reform that the federal government is pursuing assiduously. This strategy, as I have said many times, including in the House, rests upon three pillars.

The first pillar is to adopt stronger laws to help build safer communities, including new criminal legislative reforms to address hate crimes, a major overhaul of the bail and sentencing regimes that exist in the Criminal Code and, importantly, the protecting victims act.

The second pillar of this strategy involves investments in the front line, whether that is 1,000 new RCMP officers to keep our communities safe, 1,000 new CBSA officials to help combat the importation of illegal drugs and crimes or supports for the community organizations on the front line that are helping victims of crime and survivors of violence.

The third pillar, and perhaps it is the most important pillar when it comes to ending violence in the long term, demands that we make investments upstream to address the long-term challenges that communities face. This includes investments in affordable housing, transitional housing and supportive housing; investments in mental health and addictions; and investments that target at-risk youth to help build healthy people to contribute to a stronger and safer Canada.

The focus of my remarks today will be the protecting victims act.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Before I begin, it is important for me to put this debate into context. It is very important to recognize that the government has a strategy to address public safety, including a strategy to strengthen criminal laws, with investments in police forces, the organizations that protect our communities, as well as investments in affordable housing, mental health and programs that support young people.

[*English*]

Today's debate is about the protecting victims act. The bill includes a number of different elements that are focused on things such as gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, the protection of our children against exploitation, the criminalization of new sexual offences to keep pace with the changing world, the restoration of mandatory minimum penalties that have been struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada, the addressing of delays in the justice system and the better protection of victims' rights throughout the criminal trial process.

Let me begin with the pressing priority of gender-based violence in Canada. The seriousness of this issue cannot be overstated. We see a woman killed in this country every 48 hours.

[*Translation*]

There have been four femicides so far this year in Quebec alone. That is unacceptable.

[*English*]

We have to acknowledge this harsh reality, but we do not have to accept it as our destiny. We can implement changes to criminal law to better protect Canadians against violence that can become fatal.

What is important, although the statistics should shock the conscience of every Canadian, is that the victims of these fatal crimes are not numbers or statistics. They are real people. For some of us, they are the people who we grew up going to school with, who shared the same hallways over the course of our years as a youth. For others, they are the co-workers who we befriended but no longer see showing up at the office. For others still, they are the friends and family members whose lives have been taken.

To understand the impact of these tragedies, we cannot focus solely on the murder that has taken place. We also have to understand the pain that families endure in the years not lived with the people they cherished most dearly.

We can do something about this. In this important bill, we are proposing to move forward with a constructive first-degree murder charge for cases of femicide in this country. This would ensure a first-degree murder charge when a murder is committed in an intimate partner setting that has taken place in the context of a sexual offence. It would ensure that murders motivated by hate, including hatred toward someone because they are a woman, are treated as one of the most serious crimes in the Criminal Code. It would include cases of murder that were preceded by a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour.

We know, through extensive engagement with people who have dedicated their lives to understanding the solutions to gender-based violence, that the majority of cases of murder that take place in the context of intimate partner violence are preceded by a predictive pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour.

I want to pause for a moment on this particular point because we are not only moving forward with a constructive first-degree murder charge in the context of coercive control; we are also seeking to criminalize coercive control as a stand-alone infraction. We know that the pattern of using violence in the home against other family members, children or pets to control every aspect of a person's life can often offer predictive value on whether someone is at risk of a far more serious experience with violence that could become fatal.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

We know that we need to take action to combat violence against women, and to protect women and girls across the country.

[English]

We need to take action. By criminalizing coercive control, there is an opportunity for the criminal justice system to intervene before relationships become violent and before violence becomes deadly. This provision has the opportunity to save lives in this country.

I want to express my gratitude to our former parliamentary colleague Laurel Collins for her work in advancing a private member's bill on this specific issue. I want to thank the work of the parliamentarians on the status of women committee, who have urged us to take action on these kinds of issues. It is essential that we do what we can to intervene, not just after a person has been killed, but in the first instance, to save lives.

I want to read a short statement from the Coalition féministe contre la violence envers les femmes that speaks to this particular provision.

[Translation]

Criminalizing coercive control is also a critical milestone. This type of violence, which often goes unseen, is one of the main determinants of femicide. Naming it and criminalizing it will help us better understand the dynamics that lead to extreme violence. It will also help us detect high-risk situations sooner and strengthen prevention measures.

[English]

If we have the opportunity to save lives before these horrific crimes take place, we must do everything we can to do so.

In addition, there are a range of other offences we are modernizing to keep pace with changes in technology, including the crime of criminal harassment, by ensuring that we recognize the modern ways this crime can be committed, including through the use of technology to track a person's presence, for example, on a cell-phone.

We are also expanding the definition to ensure it is an objective standard that would be easier to prove in a court of law. Rather than demonstrating that a person in fact felt fear, which comes with obvious evidentiary hurdles, we want a complainant to be able to demonstrate that a reasonable person in their position, based on the facts at hand, would have felt fear.

Another issue that is garnering much attention these days is the use of artificial intelligence to create deepfakes and the sharing of intimate images that have been created with that technology. A gap exists in the law today that we must address by expanding the definition of an intimate image to those created through artificial intelligence. Deepfake technologies are expanding rapidly, and we have to ensure that our laws evolve rapidly to address this emerging threat.

[Translation]

Changing the rules as technology evolves is crucial. There is currently a problem because the law does not reflect the technologies that exist today.

[English]

So many of us are walking around with extraordinary technology in our pockets. Our phones have the ability to not only take pictures but also create images from nothing. They can also send messages

### *Government Orders*

to people in our community and around the world. By changing the definition of an intimate image to include AI deepfakes, we can better protect people against this emerging threat. In addition, we will be changing the law to expand the definition to ensure that not only the distribution of these images constitutes a crime, but also the threatened distribution, which could be used, for example, to embarrass or extort a person.

We also seek to expand the definition of the distribution of child sexual exploitation and abuse material. I will pause here before I get into some of the specifics. It is hard to imagine a more morally reprehensible behaviour than that of taking advantage of a young person for sexual purposes. Children are amongst the most vulnerable members of our community as they depend on the adults in their lives for their well-being. That someone would exploit a young child in this way deserves condemnation from all members of the House and all Canadians more broadly.

By expanding the definition of distribution to include the threatened distribution of child sexual exploitation and abuse material, we can prevent the kind of behaviour that often leads to deep trauma and enormous embarrassment, which again, can sometimes lead to fatal consequences.

We need not recite the many examples that have played out in the news. Suffice it to say there are parents living in this country today without their children, who have taken their own lives as a result of being exploited this way, for fear of the embarrassment they may live through.

We also seek to modernize the offence of child luring to ensure that the offences that would be considered include sextortion when it comes to demonstrating that the threshold has been met for the crime of child luring. We would be expanding the definitions when it comes to child sex tourism, to ensure that a Canadian abroad who commits a crime of a sexual nature against a child would face penalties when they come home. We will be working to ensure there is a mandatory reporting aspect when it comes to certain platforms that hold illicit sexual material on their websites, to help prevent crime from leading to such dire consequences. We would be expanding different offences to include invitation to sexual touching or invitation to expose oneself to an adult.

It is important that we reflect not only on the substance of these crimes that we are seeking to expand but on the penalties that should befall a person who has committed them. This bill seeks to increase the maximum penalty for a range of sexual offences, including sexual assault, sextortion, voyeurism, exposure and obtaining sexual services from a minor. It seeks to reduce the ability of people to rely on defences such as mistaken belief in age unless they have actually taken reasonable steps to ascertain a person's age.

### *Government Orders*

In addition to increasing the maximum penalty for a range of sexual offences, we have to address the mandatory minimum penalties that have been struck down by the Supreme Court. In some ways, the changes embedded in Bill C-16 follow on the heels of the *Senneville* decision, which left a gap in Canada's law when it came to mandatory minimum penalties for the distribution, possession and accessing of child sexual exploitation and abuse material, but frankly, this is an issue that has been chipped away at over years in the context of different crimes, where certain provisions have been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The *Senneville* decision relied on a hypothetical situation, which, the court viewed, would constitute a grossly disproportionate penalty should a person face a year in jail. That particular example relied upon a teenager who may have been 16 or 17 who sent an image to someone who shares it with their friend who may not have even asked for it. I can understand the court's perspective, but striking down that provision leaves a gap in the law where there are serious crimes committed against children that deserve serious punishment.

Now, thankfully, the court provided some direction on how this issue can be addressed and remedied. Thankfully, the court's direction reflects perspectives that I have heard advocated for in this House, including by members of the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party of Canada, and that are now embedded in the bill I am presenting on behalf of the Liberal government.

What we seek to do is establish a safety valve that would, in very limited circumstances where the penalty would be grossly disproportionate, permit the court to offer some other penalty that would still result in a period of incarceration. The measure we are putting forward would deal not only with the mandatory minimums that have been struck down in the *Senneville* decision but with the many cases that have struck down other mandatory minimum penalties for various serious crimes. It would not only restore the mandatory minimum penalties for those other serious crimes; it would protect the existing mandatory minimum penalties that are on the books today, which are constitutionally vulnerable.

If we have laws in our books that cannot be enforced by our law enforcement and our courts, then our Criminal Code is not worth the paper on which it is written. We have a duty to Canadians to protect them against these kinds of harm. By working with members of different parties and following the advice of the court, we can advance mandatory minimum penalties in a way that is constitutionally compliant and offers real protection to people and communities in every part of this country.

Not only do we need to address the changes I have canvassed, which are more substantive in nature or address crimes and penalties, but we have to take a long look at the appropriate process through which these cases can be adjudicated. Canada has been experiencing a decades-long problem when it comes to delays in the criminal justice system.

- (1215)

Delays, in the best case scenario, still lead to a bad outcome. Delayed justice serves neither the accused nor the victim. It does not serve the court or society. Justice delayed is justice denied, so to speak. We have a unique consequence that has stemmed from another Supreme Court decision, just a few years ago. In the *Jordan*

decision, the Supreme Court of Canada has created space for cases to be stayed, effectively terminated before they are brought to their natural conclusion. There have been nearly 10,000 cases in this country that have been thrown out, not because someone has overcome the accusation against them in a court of law, not because the prosecution has failed to discharge its burden of proof, but because the case took too long.

In my view, it does not feel like justice when a perpetrator who has committed a crime is able to walk free in our communities simply because the court took too long to arrive at a decision. Victims who have to live in the community of their assailant, who may see them in their everyday lives living in their neighbourhoods, do not feel that this decision has delivered justice.

Now, we are going to address this concern directly in a few ways. One is by demanding that the court consider remedies other than a stay of proceedings should the period of time outlined in the *Jordan* decision elapse. In addition, we will be clarifying for the court certain cases that are more complex, that deserve a longer period of time before they would run into such an issue. We also want to do what we can to improve the underlying problem by speeding up the process to get decisions in a timely way and ensure that there is timely access to justice. This will demand that we keep pace with our judicial appointments. It will involve the changes built into Bill C-16, which would streamline the process of introducing evidence in criminal justice trials. Importantly, it will engage responsibilities of other levels of government that have the jurisdiction over the administration of justice to appoint provincial court judges and Crown prosecutors and to ensure that their courts run smoothly.

In this conversation, it is important as well to ensure that victims understand they have certain rights when it comes to the criminal trial process. Too often, people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves engaged in a lengthy and challenging court proceeding can feel lost through the process. The *Victims Bill of Rights* provides some clarity, ensuring that victims are treated with respect and timely access to justice, but it can help outline more concrete ways in which victims can participate in the process with full information and ensure that victims have the information they are entitled to, such as where they may appear, where they may offer a victim's impact statement, where they could benefit from testimonial aids or supports that allow them to participate fully in the criminal justice process and have their voice reflected, potentially in the sentencing or even when people may be transferred post-conviction from one level of security facility to another. Doing a better job of incorporating the voices of victims in this process is essential if we are going to build trust in the process among those who find themselves participating in it.

*Government Orders*

As I come to the conclusion, it is essential and incumbent upon all members of this House to recognize the seriousness of the problem facing those who have experienced violence and the families who continue to live without their loved ones. We cannot assume that solutions will automatically present themselves. Although we have seen encouraging data over the past couple of years when it comes to a reduction in the rate of crime, and violent crime in particular, we know there is more work to do. This progress does not happen by accident; we have to take decisions to strengthen the laws and put supports in place.

I thank those who have informed the national action plan to end gender-based violence. I thank the many commissions that have been struck, in particular, the Renfrew County inquest and, in my home province of Nova Scotia, the Mass Casualty Commission. I thank the ombudsperson for victims of crime, members of the status of women committee and, most importantly, the many advocates and survivors of violence, including sexual violence, whose perspectives are reflected in this bill.

Bill C-16 has garnered the support of law enforcement, victims' advocates and Canadians in every part of the country. My only ask of members of this House is that they loan their support to this important bill as well.

• (1220)

**Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people from Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola and, in this context, the greater Canadian public. I want to wish a warm welcome back to this chamber to everybody.

I have a question that relates to firearms. We have seen the Liberals preside over an unprecedented proliferation of firearms usage. I checked the bill; I did a search of it. There is one provision that would deal with extortion, and it mentions an aggravating factor. The government in Bill C-5 said that people who extort with a firearm, people who do drive-by shootings, in fact, can serve their sentence on house arrest.

Does the minister not agree that people who do drive-by shootings should be subject to the previous mandatory minimum of four years for that offence, or for extortion with a firearm?

• (1225)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his work on issues that are common to this bill, as well as his own private member's bill, which I know are a priority for him. In addition to the measures he referenced, this bill contains certain measures around firearms, including the denial of licences to those who have a history of gender-based violence and the need to return a firearm if a person's licence has been revoked.

On his particular question, it is important to point out that extortion with a firearm, for example, can in fact carry a mandatory minimum in Canada. We also do not want to confuse the difference between mandatory minimums and aggravating factors, because we actually believe that extortion, in this case of a sexual nature, deserves a higher penalty.

To the extent that there are proposals that members of this House may have, the appropriate way to deal with ideas they support that

may be outside the scope of this bill is to have those advanced and debated at committee. To the extent that we receive advice from our parliamentary colleagues who will be considering this bill through the committee process, members should know that I would consider them in good faith.

**Blaine Calkins:** Madam Speaker, I have a point of order. I do not think the hon. minister would like to mislead the House, but in Bill C-5, the previous government actually removed mandatory minimum sentences—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** I am sorry, but the hon. member knows that would be a matter of debate.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[*Translation*]

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to wish you, my constituents in Berthier—Maskinongé and all of my colleagues here a happy new year.

We are starting on a rather positive note, and the Bloc Québécois supports this bill. Of course, we will have some serious and conscientious work to do at committee.

Among other things, we are pleased to see provisions related to delays in the justice system. Because of these delays, many serious crimes are not going to trial, which is outrageous, but something is finally being done about that. That is extremely important.

We agree with the new offences related to the recruitment of young people to commit crimes. We might have even gone a little further than what is set out in the bill. We will see. We will work on that in committee.

The same goes for the provisions regarding sexual harassment and violence. The bill also includes a provision that would enable judges to always use their discretion. There is a reason why justice is administered by human beings and not by software that determines which sentence corresponds to which offence.

Will the minister be open to the intelligent and thoughtful amendments that the Bloc Québécois will propose in committee?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Speaker, I would say the short answer is yes.

The measures set out in the bill did not happen by accident. We are holding discussions with national organizations and with opposition parties, including the Bloc Québécois critics, who are suggesting ideas, like the one my colleague just put forward to the House. In addition, if members from any party have ideas they would like to suggest, and if the majority of the committee agrees with these amendments, that is a good thing.

If we get a chance to improve the quality of the bill, that would be the best outcome. No single person has all the good ideas. By working together, I hope we can improve the bill.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today as a mother, but also as a survivor of domestic violence, to clearly state how important this legislation is and point out how intricate and challenging it is to create such important legislation. I know first-hand what it is like to navigate the criminal justice system as a single mother, with the fear that one lives with every day from one's experience.

I am rising today to implore our colleagues across the aisle to support the tireless work of the minister, the status of women committee and the women's caucus in their consultation with survivors, who know first-hand exactly what is needed to protect the generations to come, and the people who are willing to rise, to stand in their fear, as they want to protect those who may come after them.

• (1230)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Speaker, let me thank my colleague for her tremendous courage in sharing that experience and for her support for the measures included in this bill.

The only point of correction I have for her statement is that she cited the tireless work of the minister in this case, but it is the tireless work of survivors and advocates that we have to express our gratitude for. This bill is a result of collaboration with many people who, unfortunately, have been through experiences of violence and tried to navigate the criminal justice system at a time of enormous trauma and difficulty in their lives. Those people's voices can be empowered through interventions such as the one we have just heard, which can bring their real-life experience to bear in the debates that play out in the committee process and in this chamber.

I want to thank all members of this House, regardless of their party, for the support they may lend to this bill and the solutions they may contribute to improve its quality.

**Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, gender-based violence is rampant across our country, across the world and in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills. It is not just an isolated, out-of-the-blue act of violence; it is often a mindset that is nurtured and fostered, often systemically, within families and communities, in the workplace and online. I thank the minister for addressing this generational issue.

There are myths around the crime of coercive and controlling behaviour that say it brings policing into intimate partner relationships. Can the minister expand on how that crime would be enforced within our communities and what the positive impacts would be for our families and communities like Mississauga—Erin Mills?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Speaker, it is essential that we understand, through the extensive research done by people who have dedicated their lives to discovering the solutions to gender-based violence, particularly in an intimate partner violence context that ends with violence or, potentially, the murder of an innocent person, that there is a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour that repeats itself time and time again.

We have the opportunity to have the criminal justice system more closely explore when there is violence inside a household. We have the opportunity to have the criminal justice system intervene

when there is a pattern that may be predictive in nature, and to understand that the criminal justice system can not only address crimes after someone has been killed, but also intervene before a relationship becomes violent or someone actually dies. It is one thing to talk about an agenda that more harshly penalizes criminals, but if we have the opportunity to stop crime before it happens, we have to take it. This bill, as indicated by the statements of support from advocacy organizations, would do precisely that.

*[Translation]*

**Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, we know that the minister has often been slow to appoint judges, even though there is no shortage of Liberal donors who are willing to take those jobs. As a result, with the Jordan decision, some criminals have been released. We know the story behind the Jordan decision.

Did the minister ever consider using the notwithstanding clause to get around the Jordan decision in order to get justice for victims, if only while waiting for this bill, which broadens the criteria that judges will have to consider when applying Jordan?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Speaker, I would first like to say that I disagree with the claim that there have been delays in making appointments. There was a problem for a few years, but over the past two or three years, judicial positions have been filled very quickly and there are not many vacancies in the country right now.

To answer my colleague's question, I would say that he is presenting an interesting idea, but I worry that the courts would reject it, and we have found another way to address that concern.

• (1235)

*[English]*

**Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC):** Madam Speaker, welcome back to the House. I welcome all of my friends on the other side, as well as my colleagues, and I wish every member of the House a very happy new year. I hope to have a really productive winter and spring session in the 45th Parliament.

I start by reflecting on what Bill C-16 would and would not do. At the outset, I can state that the bill is largely supported by the Conservative Party of Canada, but there are some red lines, which I will elaborate on, that need to be discussed. We can start that debate as early as today.

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When Parliament legislates on criminal law, it does not engage in abstraction, but exercises the most serious power entrusted to a democratic legislature: the power to define wrongdoing, protect the public, including victims, and impose meaningful consequences on those who harm others. Bill C-16 fails in that responsibility, not because it is too firm but because it is too careless. It continues a troubling pattern we have seen time and time again of laws that sound tough in press releases, but are drafted so loosely, so vaguely and so defensively that they hand the control of criminal sentencing to the courts by default.

Bill C-16 claims to modernize sentencing. In reality, it would open the door to a constitutional crisis, chaos, further litigation and a steady erosion of Parliament's role in defining the moral boundaries of criminal law.

I want to remind the House that what we are debating today is simply not new. More than four years ago, during debate on Liberal Bill C-5, I stood in the chamber and warned of exactly where this approach would lead. Bill C-5 stripped away 14 mandatory minimums for very serious criminal offences, including drug charges, that Parliament had deliberately put in place to ensure the denunciation of and deterrence for serious crimes. At that time, I said that removing mandatory minimum penalties under the banner of compassion would not make our justice system fairer; it would make it weaker, less predictable and less capable of protecting the public. Four years later, that warning has not only aged well but sadly been proven correct.

Mandatory minimum penalties were never about denying judicial discretion. They were about ensuring that Parliament spoke loudly and clearly about the gravity of that danger. As I said then, and as I say today, this is not a partisan issue. Mandatory minimum penalties have been around since the very first Criminal Code in 1892 and were brought in by consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments.

Bill C-5 deliberately silenced the message reflecting the gravity of the danger that certain offences cause. Bill C-16 would do nothing to restore it. Sadly, it would continue down the same path. This is not evidence-based reform; it is policy-making driven by ideology, insulated from the real-world harm it causes.

For victims of crime, the justice system is not an academic exercise and it is not a theoretical debate about hypotheticals; it is about whether the law means what it says and whether consequences are real. That is where the bill gets it wrong. Bill C-16 tells victims one thing, yet it would deliver another. It claims to modernize sentencing, while it would reopen every door the House has tried to close.

The Liberal government wants credit for being tough on crime, but it refuses to do the hard work of writing laws that actually withstand constitutional scrutiny, protect communities and respect Parliament's role in setting punishment. The Supreme Court of Canada, in the mid-nineties and in 2016, released two landmark decisions that provided a road map to the Liberal government, under then prime minister Justin Trudeau, to do exactly these things, and nothing was done.

• (1240)

My views on this issue are not theoretical. They are shaped by decades of working inside the criminal justice system and my nearly 30 years as a lawyer, including many as a Crown prosecutor. I have stood in courtrooms with victims. I have seen their anguish and their fears. I have seen the aftermath of serious violent crimes, including gun violence.

I have watched judges struggle to impose meaningful consequences within the frameworks the Liberals chose to weaken. When legislators strip away sentencing certainty, they do not empower justice; they inject inconsistency and unpredictability into a system that depends on public confidence to function.

The charter does not prohibit mandatory minimum penalties. The Supreme Court of Canada has said that repeatedly in a number of decisions. Section 12 prohibits "cruel and unusual...punishment". The test is not whether a sentence is harsh but whether it is grossly disproportionate. That is an exacting standard, and intentionally so.

Supreme Court jurisprudence has emphasized that gross disproportionality is reserved for punishment that is "so excessive as to outrage standards of decency", not merely sentences that some judges might view as excessive or unnecessary. That distinction matters, because Parliament is constitutionally entitled to impose punishment that reflects denunciation, deterrence and moral condemnation, even when courts might prefer a lighter sentence.

The Liberal narrative pretends that any mandatory minimum risks unconstitutionality. That is simply false. It is the narrative we heard in the 44th Parliament. What creates constitutional vulnerability is careless breadth, missing guardrails and deliberate legislative ambiguity, all of which are present in Bill C-16.

Bill C-16 continues a now familiar Liberal strategy, which is drafting legislation not to withstand constitutional scrutiny but to invite it. The government legislates, knowing and, in some cases, hoping that courts will be asked to fix what Parliament refuses to resolve.

Academic literature has warned for years that overly broad criminal provisions, combined with a rigid sentencing framework, create fertile ground for section 12 litigation, particularly when Parliament fails to include clear guardrails or safety valves. The Supreme Court's section 12 jurisprudence allows courts to assess mandatory minimum penalties using reasonable hypothetical scenarios. They are not absurd and fanciful scenarios, but ones that could realistically arise under the law.

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This is where Bill C-16 becomes dangerous, because once Parliament enacts a mandatory minimum penalty without explicit statutory guardrails, it invites defence counsel to construct hypotheticals designed to stretch the law to its constitutional breaking point. This will lead to courts invalidating mandatory minimums incrementally, case by case. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute has warned that this cycle has systematically hollowed out Parliament's authority over sentencing, not because mandatory minimums are inherently unconstitutional, but because the Liberals refused to draft them responsibly. Bill C-16 repeats this mistake.

The Liberals claim that removing mandatory minimum sentences, expanding judicial discretion and hollowing out sentencing floors are required by the charter and demanded by the Supreme Court. That is false. The Supreme Court has never said that mandatory minimum penalties are illegal. It has never said that Parliament lacks the authority to impose them. What it has said repeatedly is that Parliament must legislate carefully. Bill C-16 would not do that. Instead, it would use a single, deeply divided decision as justification for dismantling sentencing law far beyond what the court required.

• (1245)

Nowhere is that misrepresentation made clearer than in the Attorney General of Quebec v. Senneville. In that case, the majority of the court struck down mandatory minimum penalties for child pornography offences, relying not on the actual facts before it but on a constructed hypothetical scenario, a scenario that Parliament never intended to capture when it enacted those sentencing provisions. The hypothetical imagined an 18-year-old who briefly received or possessed an image without evidence of predatory behaviour, coercion or exploitation. That scenario was then used to invalidate sentencing floors that were designed to address the most serious and harmful forms of child sexual exploitation, offences that involve deliberate conduct, repeat behaviour and profound harm to victims.

This is not a reasonable hypothetical in any meaningful legislative sense. Parliament does not draft criminal law to address fleeting, technical-edged cases. It legislates for the heartland of an offence, the conduct that motivated Parliament to act in the first place. Stretching a law aimed at combatting child sexual exploitation to hypothetical outliers fundamentally distorts legislative intent. That is precisely why the dissent in Senneville matters so much and why the Liberals would rather the House not talk about it.

The dissenting justices issued a clear and forceful warning not only to the courts but to Parliament. They rejected the idea that section 12 of the charter requires lawmakers to sentence for the least serious imaginable application of an offence. They emphasized that mandatory minimums are constitutionally permissible where they reflect Parliament's judgment about the gravity of core criminal conduct. The dissent cautioned that using hypotheticals to strike down laws would transform section 12 of the charter into a weapon against democratic decision-making, allowing courts to invalidate Parliament's choices based on speculative scenarios rather than real-world harm.

Instead of responding to Senneville without discipline, by clarifying offence definitions, narrowing the application or adopting a narrowly tailored safety valve, the government chose a very different path. Bill C-16 does not correct a problem identified by the court. It uses Senneville as political cover to advance a long-standing ideological goal: the systematic dismantling of mandatory minimum penalties altogether. In other words, a contested, deeply divided Supreme Court decision, a five-four split, has now become the excuse for a sweeping legislative retreat.

Bill C-16 is not in careful compliance with the charter. It is a capitulation, a surrender of Parliament's authority based on the most expansive reading of judicial power, even while the court warned against it. This is not what responsible law-making looks like and not what Canadians expect from the House.

As Chief Justice Wagner warned, alongside Côté, Rowe and O'Bonsawin, using far-removed hypotheticals to dismantle Parliament's sentencing choices risks undermining democratic accountability itself. The dissent stated plainly that Parliament is not constitutionally required to sentence for the least serious imaginable case. That sentence alone dismantles the Liberal theory of criminal law.

The dissent went further, warning that the majority's approach risks converting section 12 into a rolling licence to invalidate democratically enacted penalties untethered from real-world harm. The dissent emphasized that minimums serve expressive and denunciatory functions. They communicate society's moral judgment, not merely actuarial risk assessments. Crucially, the dissent recognized that judicial discretion already exists in the criminal process in charging decisions, prosecutorial elections, plea negotiations and sentencing ranges above the minimum. In other words, these judges acknowledged what the government refuses to admit: The system already has safety valves and Parliament is allowed to rely on them. This is where Bill C-16 collapses under its own weight.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly indicated that carefully drafted safety valves can preserve mandatory minimums while protecting against gross disproportionality. The dissent in the Supreme Court decision of Nur, from 2015, made this explicit, pointing to hybrid offences and prosecutorial discretion as legitimate mechanisms to prevent unjust outcomes.

• (1250)

Bill C-16 involves no clear statutory safety valve, no proportionality override, no exceptional circumstance clause and no direction to courts on how Parliament expects minimums to operate. It is un-serious to claim that a Liberal crime bill protects victims when it systematically weakens sentencing. Victims do not experience crime as a hypothetical. They do not experience it as a charter seminar. They experience it as fear, loss, trauma and lasting harm. Mandatory minimums are about certainty, denunciation and public trust, which is sadly lacking after 10 years of failed Liberal policies. When the government undermines Parliament's ability to set clear consequences, it sends a message to communities that criminal accountability is negotiable.

The House has a choice. We can continue down the Liberal path, drafting criminal law that collapses under constitutional pressure, inviting litigation and leaving victims behind, or we can reaffirm a basic democratic truth: Parliament sets law, courts apply it and the charter guards against true excess, not political discomfort. Bill C-16, as written, fails that test.

We must also consider the context in which Bill C-16 is being debated. Canadians are not imagining things. They are not misinformed. They are responding to reality. After nearly a decade of catch-and-release bail policies, the repeal of mandatory minimums and a long line of Liberal criminal justice reforms, Canadians are scared. They have every reason to be. Since 2015, trafficking has increased by over 80%. Sex assaults are up nearly 76%. Violent crime overall has increased by more than 50%. These are not talking points. These are StatsCan figures.

Mandatory sentencing is not optional and never should be. Parliament did not impose these penalties casually or accidentally. They were put in place precisely because certain crimes are so grave, so dangerous and so destructive that Parliament determined that incarceration must be the baseline, not the exception. That is why it is so troubling that even where Bill C-16 contains measures we can acknowledge as constructive, the government insists on embedding them inside a broader, soft-on-crime framework that undermines their effectiveness.

There are elements of the bill that move in the right direction. Banning the creation and distribution of deepfake images is necessary and long overdue. We are pleased that the government finally adopted the substance of my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill's private member's bill, Bill C-216, to protect Canadians from this new and insidious form of exploitation. Likewise, the inclusion of mandatory reporting requirements for child sex abuse material, also drawn from that private member's bill, is a necessary step.

I am also pleased to see the government finally adopting an approach that Conservatives have been calling for all along, recognizing the murder of an intimate partner as first degree, a reform championed by my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola in his private member's bill.

These positive measures do not excuse what comes next. Despite these additions, Bill C-16 continues the Liberal pattern of weakening accountability. The bill would empower judges to disregard virtually every mandatory prison sentence in the code, with the exception of two: murder and treason. That includes mandatory penalties

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for aggravated sexual assault with a firearm, human trafficking, extortion with a firearm, drive-by shootings and multiple firearm offences. If judges are permitted to simply opt out of these penalties, then nothing about these sentences is mandatory, full stop. This is not reform. This is an abdication of our responsibility. If the government were serious about public safety, it would split the poison pill from the bill and allow Parliament to work constructively on the provisions that genuinely protect Canadians.

Conservatives believe that Parliament must stand with victims, not with legal loopholes. We believe accountability must be real, not optional. We believe that the role of the House is to protect Canadians, not to explain away its own inaction. The bill can be made better, but only if the Liberals are prepared to abandon their soft-on-crime reflex and take public safety seriously for a change.

• (1255)

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member has had conversations with the Minister of Justice.

There are sections of Bill C-16 that Greens will support, but there are other sections that we would like amended. Does the hon. member have a sense from the government as to whether amendments will be entertained and if we could move swiftly on the parts we all agree on, such as proper sentencing, and move quickly against intimate partner violence?

**Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, that is an important question. I am very hopeful that 2026 ushers in a positive change in the House of Commons.

Today the Prime Minister and the government House leader gave press conferences setting out their purpose for the winter and spring session. They want to prioritize the quick passage of Bill C-14 and Bill C-16. We are currently debating that. In fact, it may have already been passed at justice committee, which started at 11 o'clock. We want to prioritize Bill C-14, because this is what Canadians want.

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I had a conversation with the justice minister, but we did not get to the point where he would actually admit to any willingness to accept reasonable amendments. In the spirit in which the Prime Minister and the government House leader made their comments today, I would hope that would be predictive of his approach and instructions to his parliamentary secretary and his colleagues on the justice committee.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed in a number of the comments that the member put on the record today. I took, in good faith, what the leader of the Conservative Party indicated.

On the importance of the crime agenda, the member knows full well what happened back in December. Canadians could have had bail reform. We could have had better bail laws had the Conservative Party taken a different approach in dealing with crime legislation. Bill C-16, which deals with issues like gender-based violence and child predators, is very important legislation. There was an expectation that the Conservatives would show more co-operation with the government to pass these important pieces of legislation.

Will the member give a clear indication on whether or not the Conservatives would like to see the bill sent to committee, where it could have further debate?

**Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, I can answer the question very affirmatively. It is yes.

Ideally, we want this bill to be split in order to focus in on those areas that have been long overdue for 10 years. Victims, law agencies and victim advocacy groups have all been asking for additional reforms to prioritize the needs of victims, to recalibrate the focus on bail and to take a look at community safety, while at the same time upholding the constitutional rights of the accused.

Where was the Liberal government? The government would say it was all in our minds. In fact, Arif Virani, literally minutes after his swearing-in at Rideau Hall, answered a number of press reporters by simply indicating that the whole concept of Canada being a dangerous place was all fictitious and was all in the minds of Canadians.

I read the justice minister's end-of-term report to a national reporter saying that he is listening to Canadians. It is absolutely about time. As Conservative Party members, including me and my former colleague who is a Crown prosecutor, we have been pushing and advocating for sentencing and justice reforms to reflect what the Canadian public wants. I have invited—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès):** We will go to more questions.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to much of my colleague's speech, but I am having a hard time understanding some of his arguments.

From what I see, this bill is intended to close loopholes and ensure that serious crimes are prosecuted, including cases that did not go to trial because of the Jordan decision. The Bloc Québécois had

said that the notwithstanding clause should be used because that makes no sense.

My colleague generally agrees with the idea of minimum sentences. However, from what I understand so far, more such sentences will be imposed. I am therefore having a hard time understanding the opposition. Could my colleague clarify his position on this? I am interested in hearing it.

● (1300)

[*English*]

**Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear about something. Bill C-16 would make available the possibility that all the mandatory minimum penalties that were ruled unconstitutional by appellate courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, get reopened. This would include the most recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in Senneville, which was on the possession of child sexual abuse material. This bill would bring back all the mandatory minimum penalties that were ruled unconstitutional but not removed from the Criminal Code.

That would provide an overly broad safety valve to any judge, without any instruction from Parliament. There would be no guardrails for a justice on their own or when hearing from the accused offender at sentencing, or from the defence counsel. There would be an argument that the imposition of a mandatory minimum penalty could lead to cruel and unusual punishment. That is the test. That is what Bill C-16 would do. It would invite more litigation. It would slow the process, which is still trying to catch up from the aftermath of the pandemic.

We do not need more litigation. We need clarity from Parliament. That is why we hope Bill C-16 will be studied as soon as possible at the justice committee, in order to make it better.

**Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. I thank my hon. colleague from Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations for his very compelling intervention.

The question I have for my hon. colleague is the same one I asked the Minister of Justice, but I do not feel we got a satisfactory answer. In their 10 years of government, with Bill C-5, the Liberals legislated that people who do drive-by shootings and extortion with a firearm can serve their sentences on house arrest.

Why is it that we are not addressing the ferocious gun crime? We have seen extortion go up over 300%. Why are we not addressing this? That is what is killing people, among other things.

**Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that excellent question because it is important that legislation reflect not only the will of the public but also a rigorous debate in the House of Commons.

*Government Orders*

My friend commented on the rising level of gun crime and the outrageous extortion numbers, particularly in British Columbia. I was out there recently, giving a press conference. I was shocked to learn that there were 30 cases of extortion involving firearm usage in 21 days. There was nary a word from the Prime Minister, nary a word from the justice minister and, particularly, nary a word at all from the Liberal MPs from Surrey.

Yes, this is an invitation. It is a wake-up call. The justice minister said that he is listening to Canadians. Canadians want tougher penalties and want them now. They do not want any activist judges to determine what is a fit and proper sentence.

**Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I find this interesting. I know the member opposite is very well versed in the law and the different jurisdictions that operate in our country. Drafting laws is a federal responsibility. Implementing them is a provincial responsibility. Local police are involved as well.

Speaking of local police, the Canadian Police Association has stated:

It is encouraging to see the federal government respond quickly when concerns arise about how the justice system manages serious public safety issues. Courts must operate independently, but there are times when outcomes naturally raise questions for the public and for front line officers about whether the process reflects the gravity of the offences involved. Legislative action such as Bill C-16 helps reinforce confidence that the system can adapt when needed to protect the most vulnerable.

We have police associations across the country agreeing that Bill C-16 is a solid bill. Can the member please put his politics aside and get behind this bill?

• (1305)

**Larry Brock:** Madam Speaker, clearly, my colleague opposite did not listen to a word I had to say, because I indicated that the vast majority of the provisions that deal with trial delays and victims are going to be supportable by the Conservative Party of Canada.

Where we differ, and I would beg to differ with her, is with respect to the position of law enforcement. They want meaningful sentences. They do not want activist judges or clever defence counsel now arguing without the appropriate guardrails or any instruction from Parliament as to what constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

At the very least, they should define it in Bill C-16. They have not done that.

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to speak to this important bill today. I am torn between being happy and surprised by the speech by the colleague who spoke before me. He does remarkable work in many ways at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Unfortunately, our Conservative colleagues have been slowing down the committee's work for months by filibustering Bill C-9.

They are against Bill C-9. We understand that and that is their right, but we still need to keep moving forward. They are holding

up the work on Bill C-14. They are also holding up the work that we need to do on Bill C-16. These are three important bills and there are more. The committee is rather spoiled this year to have three major pieces of government legislation. They are being held up because our Conservative colleagues, who say that we need to pick up the pace, are actually slowing things down in committee.

I feel like picking up on what my colleague was saying in his speech: We need to put our money where our mouth is, or at least, set the rhetoric aside for a moment. We need action. I want to see my Conservative colleagues take action because I want to see Bill C-9 and Bill C-14 pass. I think that Bill C-16, which we are studying today, is just as important as the other two.

I want to begin by saying that the Bloc Québécois will support passing Bill C-16 here at second reading so that we can study it in committee and pass it as quickly as possible. That is why our voters elected us, regardless of our party affiliation, and that is what the Bloc Québécois wants us to do.

Bill C-16 is what we might call a sweeping bill. If memory serves, I think it is 166 pages long and covers a wide range of topics. We have identified some that I think deserve the attention of the House.

To begin, the issue of coercive or controlling conduct has previously been the subject of a number of bills that, regrettably, were unsuccessful for all sorts of good or bad reasons. The most recent one died on the Order Paper last spring because of the elections in April 2025 before it could be passed in the Senate, where it went after being passed here in the House of Commons.

Now the government has come back with a bill that addresses this issue. I hope that this time, despite our Conservative colleagues' delay tactics at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we will be able to get to work and pass this bill. Quebeckers and Canadians, all our constituents, are asking us to do so, and they have a right to expect serious and diligent work on our part.

When it comes to controlling and coercive behaviour, we know that society is changing. It is changing for the better in many ways, but this also brings a number of new challenges. Intimate partner relationships have evolved over time for all sorts of reasons. I am not a sociologist, so I will not attempt to explain all the changes in society. In any case, this issue has evolved, and today we are seeing an increase in cases where one partner in a relationship exercises control over the other to the point of not only violating the other person's rights and freedoms, but also undermining their security and peace of mind, and sometimes even threatening their physical safety. This cannot be tolerated in a free and democratic society.

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I do not want to repeat what has already been said many times over the past few years on this issue, but I think it is high time that we exert a measure of control over this problem, that we criminalize this behaviour and deal with it as much as possible. Obviously, some of the work will have to be done by the executive branch and police forces. Provincial parliaments, such as the National Assembly in Quebec City, will all have to address these problems. The federal government can still send a clear message by amending the Criminal Code.

I am therefore very pleased to see that this issue is being addressed again. Bloc Québécois members agree that this is important, and we will support the bill.

There is also the issue of femicide. We will have to agree on a definition of what constitutes femicide. Dictionaries offer a definition that goes something like this: a crime committed against a woman for the sole reason that she is a woman. That obviously makes no sense.

• (1310)

Evidently, we are in favour of fighting against such a backward and narrow-minded attitude, which should in no way be tolerated in our society.

There is also the other definition of femicide, which encompasses all crimes against women. Obviously, the problem can be quite different. I have no solution to propose. I am just saying that we should consider calling a spade a spade. I am thinking of the Polytechnique tragedy, which happened a long time ago. Someone walked into a classroom and killed women who were strangers to him simply because they were women. In my opinion, this is clearly a femicide.

Now, there are other situations where people kill their female partners. This is often due in large part to a history of controlling and coercive conduct toward their partner. The individual feels like he is going to lose that power, so he kills her in a fit of anger, or for some other reason. That is not acceptable either. We need to address both of these behaviours. Bill C-16 will create clear, significant criminal provisions. However, there is also a problem, or at least a challenge, with regard to education in our societies.

My wife was a teacher for her entire career. People who see my grey hair will probably assume that she is retired, and they are right. However, she still has many years of experience. She told me that the way children relate to each other in the classroom and on the playground changed over the course of her career. I can say that in 2026, things are no longer the way they were in 1980 or even in 1960. Relationships are much more complex.

Social media is now an integral part of children's daily, even hourly, lives. Kids are suggestible, and they experience the repercussions, both good and bad, of this vast communication network that they access on their phones. They are being influenced. We have worked long and hard on legislation to control what circulates on the Internet. That work will have to continue. Bill C-16 proposes measures to protect intimate images, including visual representations, which are also a new phenomenon.

When we look at Facebook and similar sites on our phones and we see these short videos, we get really scared, but I found out that half of these videos, if not more, are fake. They are edited. If these videos can influence me and rile me up, imagine how a six-year-old girl, a 12-year-old boy or an eight-year-old boy feels watching these videos. It can have a significant influence on them and, unfortunately, it is often a negative one.

This bill would prohibit the distribution of not only intimate images but also visual representations showing an identifiable person depicted as nude. These are important measures in Bill C-16. There are also all sorts of other measures that focus on control.

I would like to return to the issue of femicide. We need to crack down on femicide. Bill C-16 indicates that these crimes will be treated as first-degree murder. That is good news. If a person kills his partner because he has been controlling her for months or years and feels like he is going to lose that control because she wants to break up, for example, I think we can easily equate that with premeditation and consider it first-degree murder. I welcome this measure, and the Bloc Québécois as a whole welcomes this provision.

There is also the question of the definition of harassment. Previously, in order for harassment to be considered criminal harassment, it had to be proven that the victim subjectively feared for their safety. Obviously, this led to lengthy questioning and cross-examination of victims. It had to be proven that the victim had really been afraid or that she had not been afraid but had thought afterwards that she could have been afraid. Victims were subjected to lengthy cross-examination in an attempt to cast doubt on their fears.

• (1315)

I think that it is practically indecent to do that to a victim of a behaviour that can be likened to criminal harassment. I think there needs to be more compassion for victims. Under Bill C-16, if the conduct of the individual in question can reasonably be interpreted as harassment or if it could cause the victim to believe that their safety or that of someone known to them is threatened, this constitutes evidence of criminal harassment. In our opinion, this is also good news, and we will fully support this provision.

There is also the issue of recruiting people under the age of 18. That is a major problem and another issue. Bill C-16 could have been split up into several bills. Our Conservative colleague said that it could have been split. I agree to some extent, but we need to act quickly. We need to address these problems. We have already discussed them at length a number of times. It is time to act. I applaud the minister's decision to take action on these issues.

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The recruitment of individuals under the age of 18 was still being discussed last year. I have raised this issue with the minister on a number of occasions. We have seen cases of 13- or 14-year-olds, sometimes kids even younger, being recruited by criminal organizations to commit crimes. They are told that they can earn money easily, simply by committing a certain crime or doing a certain thing, and they will get paid. They are told not to worry if they get caught, because sentences for minors are less severe than adult sentences. Criminals do not have to face the consequences of the crimes they want to commit because they get young people under the age of 18 to commit them for them. It is despicable and unacceptable. We need to crack down on this. I suggested to the minister that individuals who recruit young people to commit crimes should face double the sentence that would have been imposed if they had committed the crime themselves. The penalties must be severe.

The bill does not go that far; the maximum sentence is five years. We will discuss this in committee. I may have some amendments to propose, but we are moving in the right direction. We must fight this problem. The Bloc Québécois stands with the minister in this fight, and we may propose even tougher penalties, as I said.

There is the issue of minimum prison sentences, which is a whole saga. I cannot speak to what happened before, but for the 10 years I have been here, I have seen a kind of conflict of values or vision raging between the Liberals and the Conservatives. Liberals are in favour of releasing people accused of criminal offences at the earliest opportunity. I tend to agree with that approach. However, Conservatives argue the opposite, saying that the accused should be kept in custody until their trial, after which their guilt or innocence will be determined. I do not entirely agree with that.

Yes, we need to make our streets safer. Something needs to be done to make people feel safer on the streets of Quebec and Canada. The minimum sentences provided for in the Criminal Code can have an impact.

I proposed an idea that I heard from an expert witness I had asked to appear at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights two or three years ago. She was a university professor, and I had asked her a question. As we have seen, the Supreme Court prohibited or overturned the minimum sentences imposed by the Conservatives when they were in power. The Liberals abolished them, and rightly so, since the Supreme Court had told them to do so. Now, the government wants to reinstate them.

I asked this expert whether there was a middle ground, a compromise between the two. I asked her if we could set minimum sentences in situations where we think it would be a useful way to send a clear message to criminals that this is unacceptable, while allowing the judges and courts hearing the evidence to deviate from the minimum sentences in certain cases, but only in special circumstances that warrant such an exception.

This forces the court to defend its decision. If it deviates from a minimum sentence of five or 10 years, for example, it must give its reasons. In a few paragraphs or even a few pages, it has to explain why the minimum sentence is inappropriate in that specific case. I am very happy to report that the minister chose to go that route. The provision in the bill is not exactly what I had suggested, but I think it is a good approach. The court will be able to make an ex-

ception if the minimum sentence would amount to cruel and unusual punishment. The concept of cruel and unusual punishment already exists, and now it is going to be applied to exceptions to mandatory minimum sentences. I certainly welcome that.

● (1320)

We will see how things go in committee. I will very likely have some amendments to suggest there as well. We will see what our Conservative and Liberal colleagues have to say because I think that, when there are good discussions at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the light often shines through. Perhaps after hearing from other witnesses and from our colleagues, we will come up with other solutions or approaches, and that will be a good thing. We will see. However, we need to work on it and I am really pleased to see that the minister is addressing this problem.

Then there is the issue of unreasonable delay. As we know, trials often used to take far too long. Eventually, the Supreme Court decided to put an end to the delays with the infamous Jordan decision. It ruled that a trial before the Quebec court must be held within 18 months and that a trial before a superior court must be held within 30 months. These standards were established by the Supreme Court, and they make sense. I will be the first to agree with those time limits. I think we owe it to both the victim and the criminal to resolve the question of guilt within a relatively short period of time, without being overly hasty. No one wants to charge someone with a crime and hang them the following week. There needs to be enough time to hold a trial, hear witnesses, gather all the evidence and render a fair and reasonable decision. However, that needs to happen within a fair and reasonable time frame.

When the victim of a crime sees the trial against their assailant drag on for three, four or five years, at some point, they have the right to say that justice has not been served. They have the right to say that, whatever the decision may be, it is not justice. Decisions must be handed down within a much more reasonable time frame. Individuals accused of a crime that they have actually committed and who are likely to be found guilty do not mind so much if the trial takes time, especially since, if they are detained during that period, that time will count towards their sentence. It used to count as double the time. Now it counts as two-thirds. In any case, that may suit the offender. However, let us imagine that an individual is charged with a crime they did not commit and that, at the end of the trial, they are found not guilty and thus acquitted. That individual could have had to wait three or four years, for example, before being found not guilty. That makes no sense either. It makes no sense for the victims, it makes no sense for the accused and it makes no sense for society. We need to work towards being more effective.

*Government Orders*

The Bloc Québécois proposed deviating from the reasonable time frame by using the notwithstanding clause, which allows us to override the charter. We must not forget that being tried within a reasonable time is a charter right. The Supreme Court established what a reasonable time frame is, but the concept of a reasonable time is in the charter. We therefore proposed using the notwithstanding clause for specific crimes that are more serious. The minister rejected our suggestion and said that, instead, delays would be calculated based on factors that might not always be taken into account, such as case complexity and other things.

My time is up, but I would like to close by saying that I welcome this proposal in Bill C-16. We will discuss it and try to find ways to ensure that the entire population of Quebec, the provinces and Canada can be proud of our work and feel safe in our society.

• (1325)

[*English*]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the feedback we have been hearing from the Bloc. I know the minister responded relatively positively to the idea that we should try to get it to committee and have the healthy discussion. Hopefully, we will see some legislation ultimately pass in a form that would make all Canadians proud.

The member made reference to intimate images. It is currently an offence for non-consensual images to be put on the Internet or distributed. The member also emphasized, in his comments, the issue of deepfakes. Like the member, I have seen all sorts of deepfakes that very much look real. We are seeing a growing industry in that area on the Internet.

I wonder if the member could provide further comment with respect to that. Is he comfortable with what the government is proposing? Could he also provide his thoughts in regard to, from my perspective, getting it to the committee sooner as opposed to later?

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and comments.

As I said, I support this bill, but it needs to be reworked. There are things that can and must be amended. I agree with him about deepfakes. This is a serious issue that also needs to be addressed. It is a new problem, a problem that society has in 2026, and we need to address it.

That said, I do not want us to lose sight of reality. The government has certain responsibilities. The House will assume its responsibilities. I hope that we can do so because, as I said earlier, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is dealing with filibustering. I hope that we can put an end to that and quickly pass these bills.

We also need to ensure that the provinces have the necessary resources to tackle this problem at its source. We need to work on education, help our young people learn to accept differences and encourage them to participate in discussions and mediation. We must restore harmony in our schools. We are talking about simple things

like speaking to and treating others with respect. We need to work hard on that. That is a provincial responsibility, not a federal one, but the federal government can play a role by providing funding, releasing money for Quebec and the provinces so that they can effectively address these issues, which lead to the problems that we are trying to resolve here by amending the Criminal Code.

[*English*]

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I enjoyed serving with the member for Rivière-du-Nord on the justice committee when I was there in the last Parliament.

I am happy the member raised the issue of the Jordan decision. From time to time, there are delays in criminal trials, and the Supreme Court weighed in with a case called Jordan and set minimum timelines. This hits home for me because there was a high-profile murder in the metro Vancouver area a few years ago. The family members lived in my riding. This is exactly what happened, although then the judge made the right decision by very much doing the calculus that this bill now sets out regarding how to measure delays.

In the hon. member's opinion, does Bill C-16 adequately answer the challenges that the Jordan decision has introduced into criminal law?

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I, too, greatly enjoyed serving with him on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. He is a gentleman, an intelligent one, and it is always a pleasure to have discussions with him.

Yes, we agree on the proposal set out in Bill C-16 regarding the issue of reasonable time limits. As I said earlier, we were approaching this issue differently until the courts were able to take action. It takes money, courthouses, courtrooms, judges, bailiffs, clerks. It requires a lot of money that Quebec does not have, and neither do the Canadian provinces. Everyone is facing budget constraints. Money will have to be found. I suggested to my previous colleague that money be put into education to address these issues upstream. I think that is important.

There is also the matter of backlogs. We have to be honest with ourselves. There is only one way to fix the backlog problem. It will take judges, rooms and staff, and all of that costs money. The federal government also needs to appoint judges. When it comes to appointments, there have been good times and not-so-good times. I invite my colleague, the Minister of Justice, to work to ensure that judicial vacancies are filled within a reasonable time as well. I do not know whether the backlog is one, three or six months, but it needs to be addressed as fast as possible. That is how we are going to fight the backlog problem. In the meantime, holes need to be plugged. We have to make sure that high-profile criminals are not released at the expense of public safety and against all common sense.

*Government Orders*

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-16. However, I suspect that what this bill proposes will fall short. We will keep working on that.

• (1330)

**Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, in the Jordan decision, the Supreme Court established reasonable time limits in which trials must be held. I understand that, in the bill, the minister is expanding the criteria that the court will have to consider when it redefines what constitutes reasonable time limits.

I am wondering about the possibility that, ultimately, at the end of the exercise, with these new criteria, the Supreme Court will again propose reasonable time limits that will be difficult to meet. I am wondering whether this might be a bit of an exercise in futility and whether, sooner or later, we will be forced into having another debate on the use of the notwithstanding clause to put an end to the abuses that have been caused by the Jordan decision.

To what extent does my colleague believe that the minister's approach will address this issue from a legal perspective, even beyond the issue of budgets?

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Mirabel. I also really enjoy working with him. He is a brilliant man who excels at numbers, which is not my forte.

I agree with him on that point. I also believe that, despite Bill C-16, this is not going to succeed in the short or medium term. Again, we can lie to ourselves and pass 300 bills on the issue, but the only way to resolve the problem of trials being held within a reasonable time frame is to ensure proper funding.

We see the current state of our roads and it is appalling. We wait in our hospitals endlessly, from 24 to 48 hours in the emergency room, just to be seen. Children in schools have next to no services, because we lack the funds to hire specialized staff. When the government passes a budget, that obviously comes first. It is also obvious that justice is not quite as compelling. The government is going to put money into roads, schools and hospitals first. I would never blame anyone for that. However, we are going to have to tackle the justice problem, because if we cannot administer justice within a reasonable time frame, people are going to get fed up and take action in a way that no one here would want to see happen.

Bill C-16 and its time calculation method will help for a while, yes. I certainly hope so. Deviating from the time limits set for serious crimes is what we proposed, and I still agree. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that these are temporary proposals meant to last only until we really manage to get the problem under control and until it never again takes longer than 18 or 30 months to hold a trial anywhere in Quebec or Canada.

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, one of the things we need to recognize is that the federal government plays a critical role, obviously. That is why we have come together with a crime package, a series of bills. Bill C-16 is one of them. It also involves and incorporates the need for provinces, which are often appointing the judges and providing the funds for courts. There are police and law enforcement agencies that go beyond the RCMP. It is multi-

faceted. We all have a responsibility, in terms of the different levels of government.

I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts. Yes, we bring forward legislation. We do, through equalizations and so forth, provide support for the Crown. We also need the provinces and, to a certain degree, all levels of government to step up to the plate as the Prime Minister has done.

• (1335)

[Translation]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I agree with him: The provinces have an important role to play, as does Quebec. The problem that I was raising is that Quebec and the provinces do not have any money. People send money to the federal government, and the federal government says that it will send it back to the provinces, but with conditions, and that does not suit anyone.

We fight for months and years, and nothing gets done on the ground. If we resolve the issue of funding for the justice system, then a lot of the problems will be solved.

[English]

**Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, first I want to say happy new year to everyone. It is a real pleasure to be back in the House with all my colleagues to do the important work for Canadians.

I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for South Shore—St. Margarets.

I rise today to speak in strong support of Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, one of the most consequential updates to Canada's criminal code in generations.

As the member of Parliament for Davenport, a diverse downtown Toronto riding with families from every corner of the world, I hear regularly from constituents who are deeply concerned about safety in their communities: parents who worry about their children's safety online, women who tell me they do not feel safe walking alone at night and survivors of intimate partner violence who share their stories of living in fear even after leaving abusive relationships. These are not abstract policy questions; they are lived experiences of people I represent. The legislation would respond directly to their concerns.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-16 is the third major piece of criminal justice legislation introduced by our Minister of Justice. Last year, in September, we introduced Bill C-9, the combatting hate act, which would protect communities of faith from hate crimes and intimidation. In October we introduced Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act, which would ensure that repeat violent offenders face tougher bail conditions and stronger sentences. Both of these bills have received strong support from the local police in my hometown of Toronto, both from the Toronto Police Service and the Toronto Police Association. They have called for the bills' rapid passage to give law enforcement the tools it needs to keep our communities safe.

I hope members of the House will join me in supporting the swift passage of all three of these critical pieces of legislation. I did hear the good news earlier today that the justice committee is already moving very swiftly through Bill C-14. This is great news indeed. Together with Bill C-14, these reforms would send a clear message that our government is keeping Canadians safe, protecting the vulnerable and ensuring that criminals face the full force of the law.

The statistics around women and girls and gender-based violence are devastating. In 2024 alone there were 100 victims of intimate partner violence in Canada, an increase from the year before. Behind each of these numbers is a daughter, a mother, a sister or a friend: someone whose life was cut short by violence that was driven by control and fear.

We know that intimate partner violence often follows a pattern. It begins with control: Isolating the victim from family and friends, monitoring every move or controlling their finances. Too often this coercive control escalates to physical violence, and too often it ends in tragedy. Bill C-16 would address this reality head-on by creating a new criminal offence for coercive control and recognizing that intimate partner violence does not begin the first time someone is physically harmed; it begins when patterns of controlling behaviour strip away someone's freedom and dignity.

The legislation also would treat femicide, the killing of women because they are women, particularly in the context of intimate partner violence, as first-degree murder. When someone kills their intimate partner as part of a demonstrated pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour, that crime deserves to be treated with the utmost seriousness, and I am so happy that we have elevated this to first-degree murder. I would say that it is about time.

Bill C-16 also would strengthen the criminal harassment offence by removing the requirement to prove that the victim subjectively feared for their safety. Instead the test would be whether the harassing conduct would reasonably be expected to cause the victim to believe someone's safety is threatened. This change would recognize that victims should not have to prove their fear; the conduct itself should be the focus.

Bill C-16 would also address online forms of sexual violence. Technology has created new avenues for sexual violence that our laws must address. Bill C-16 would criminalize the distribution of non-consensual sexual deepfakes, AI-generated images or videos that depict someone in sexually explicit scenarios without their consent. These deepfakes can destroy reputations, cause profound psychological harm and, in some cases, be used to extort victims. Our laws must catch up to this disturbing reality.

We would also increase penalties for sexual offences including the distribution of intimate images without consent, sexual assault exposure and voyeurism. These crimes cause lasting trauma, and our penalties must reflect their severity.

I have spent years working with families in Davenport, and nothing is more important to me than keeping our children safe. The exploitation of children, whether online or in person, is among the most horrific crimes imaginable. We know that child sexual abuse and exploitation material is proliferating online at alarming rates. We know that predators use the Internet to lure, manipulate and exploit children and that our laws have not kept pace with these threats. Bill C-16 would take strong action to reinforce mandatory minimum penalties for people who create, possess and distribute child sexual abuse and exploitation material. This includes restoring 13 mandatory minimum penalties for child sexual offences that were previously struck down by courts.

● (1340)

I know that some people may question mandatory minimums, but let me be clear: When it comes to predators who prey on children, who create and distribute images of their abuse, there must be consequences. In the rare circumstances where applying a mandatory minimum sentence would be grossly disproportionate, courts would still have the discretion to impose an alternate term of imprisonment, but jail time would be kept for people convicted of those heinous crimes.

We would also toughen laws to crack down on child luring and online sextortion, making it illegal to threaten to distribute child sexual abuse material. This directly responds to the devastating rise in sextortion cases where predators target children online, manipulate them into sending explicit images and then threaten to share those images unless the child complies with further demands.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-16 would also criminalize the distribution of bestiality depictions used by predators to manipulate and exploit children, and we would also create a new offence targeting adults who recruit, pressure or counsel children to commit crimes, protecting our youth from being exploited into criminal activity, something I hear a lot about in my home community of Davenport. Finally, we would strengthen the obligations on Internet service providers under the mandatory reporting act to combat the distribution of child sexual abuse material. Online platforms must be part of the solution.

For too long, our justice system has retraumatized victims. Bill C-16 would create new rights for victims, including the right to be treated with respect and to have timely resolution of their cases considered. We would make testimonial aids automatically available, improving access to information and raising the bar for defence attorneys to access the therapeutic records and personal communications of victims. As the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime reported, victims of sexual violence deserve better.

With respect to court delays, we are requesting courts to consider alternatives to stays of proceedings, while streamlining procedures. We are encouraging diversion for low-risk cases to free up resources for more serious violent crimes, because justice delayed is justice denied.

I want to bring this back to my constituents in Davenport. In my riding, there are women who are afraid to leave abusive relationships because they do not believe the justice system will protect them. There are children who are being targeted by online predators. There are seniors who have been victims of extortion and intimidation. These Canadians deserve a justice system that protects them, treats them with dignity and holds perpetrators accountable. That is what Bill C-16 would deliver, not perfectly, because no single piece of legislation can solve all of the challenges our justice system has, but meaningfully and substantively.

I recognize there will be debate about specific provisions. As the bill, I hope, proceeds to committee, I encourage all members to engage constructively and to propose amendments that would strengthen the legislation. We cannot do nothing. We cannot continue to read about women killed by intimate partners. We cannot continue to read about children exploited online and about violent offenders reoffending after release.

Bill C-16 is about values. It values victim safety over predator convenience, recognizes intimate partner violence as a serious crime and would ensure that children grow up free from exploitation. Every Canadian deserves to live free from violence and fear. Every child deserves to grow up safe. Every victim deserves to be heard and respected. The legislation would move us closer to that Canada. Let us send a clear message: Violence against women and children will not be tolerated, predators will face consequences and victims will be heard, respected and protected.

• (1345)

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Madam Speaker, among other things, this bill introduces the concept of femicide, which is in response to a shocking rise in intimate partner violence in Canada. Effectively, that provision of Bill C-16 would elevate what might otherwise be second-degree murder to

first-degree murder if done in the context of intimate partner violence.

I think we are signalling that we are going to agree with this, but I wonder if the member could comment on whether it would survive an inevitable Charter of Rights challenge.

**Julie Dzerowicz:** Madam Speaker, the protecting victims act, Bill C-16, would be one of the most significant updates to Canada's criminal justice system in generations. I heard there are concerns on the other side about there being a court challenge. As the minister said this morning, he has taken into consideration what has happened in the Supreme Court. This has provided some guidance on how we can avoid these types of constitutional challenges in the future.

[*Translation*]

**Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech, and a fairly simple question came to mind.

Bill C-16 seeks to put an end to automatic dismissals of cases under the Jordan decision, which was handed down 10 years ago. Who has been in power for the past 10 years? It has been the same Liberal Party all that time. My question is quite simple: Why did the government wait 10 years to fix a problem that we already knew about 10 years ago?

[*English*]

**Julie Dzerowicz:** Madam Speaker, I think this year is going to be a year of action. I want to say to the hon. member that I was very hopeful when I heard some of the speeches this morning. There is a spirit of co-operation, a spirit of positivity and a spirit that shows we will work together to make sure we are passing legislation that will protect Canadians.

I am very proud of the legislation being introduced today, and I hope all members will pass it quickly through the House.

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I am very concerned as well. I am glad to see Bill C-16 debated in this place after having been introduced in December. I think we need to move more quickly on legislation. We have not had a very full legislative package since the election. This is one bill I feel very strongly about.

I want to say a name out loud here. She is one of the more recent victims of alleged intimate partner violence. Her former husband is awaiting trial. I want to say the name of Laura Gover, who died not long ago in Saanich. She was a mom. She was much loved in the community and a victim, we believe, of intimate partner violence.

**Julie Dzerowicz:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for recognizing this extraordinary woman.

*Government Orders*

I am going to repeat something the minister said this morning after he gave his speech. There is work behind Bill C-16, which, as I mentioned before, would be one of the most significant updates to Canada's criminal justice system. It is very aggressive in ensuring that we modernize the Criminal Code to respond to the most contemporary threats, to intervene earlier, to prevent violence and to make sure the justice system works faster and more fairly for victims and survivors. This work was not just done because we talked to a number of legislators. This is because of the work of the status of women committee. This is because of the work of advocate groups. This is because of all the victims of violence in this country.

It is perhaps too long in the making, but it is finally here. Let us get going and let us pass this legislation.

● (1350)

**Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I rise today in complete support of Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, and to speak about why this legislation matters so much. It is profoundly important to people in Nova Scotia and in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets.

I am also going to speak today as a former educator and high school principal. Everyone in this chamber can imagine some of the things I have seen in my riding in regard to children.

This bill represents one of the most significant updates to Canada's criminal justice system in generations. It is broad in scope, but its purpose is clear: to respond to modern forms of violence and exploitation, to intervene earlier, to protect victims and survivors, and to ensure our justice system works faster and more fairly. Bill C-16 does this through its four pillars: tackling gender-based violence and intimate partner violence; protecting children from predators; strengthening victims' rights; and addressing court delays.

That work is urgently needed in Nova Scotia. Our province has some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the country. Intimate partner violence, criminal harassment and coercive control are persistent realities, particularly in the rural and coastal communities I help represent. In recognition of this, Nova Scotia became the first province in Canada to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. That declaration reflected what survivors, advocates and frontline workers already knew. This violence is systemic, patterned and too often predictable.

Bill C-16 meets that reality head-on. Under its first pillar, the bill takes decisive action that would prevent violence before it becomes lethal. For the first time in Canadian law, it would create a new offence for a pattern of coercive and controlling conduct toward an intimate partner. Survivors have told us repeatedly that abuse is rarely about one single incident. It is about isolation, intimidation, surveillance, financial control and psychological manipulation. These patterns strip away safety and autonomy long before physical violence appears. By naming coercive control as a criminal offence, Bill C-16 would give law enforcement and the courts a tool to intervene earlier, when lives can still be saved.

This bill also recognizes the severity of violence driven by control and fear. It would provide that murders committed in the con-

text of coercive control, sexual violence, human trafficking or hate are femicides committed against a woman and would be treated as first-degree murders, even where traditional planning and deliberation are difficult to prove. This reflects the lived reality of many intimate partner homicides that are not spontaneous acts but rather the end point of long, documented patterns of abuse. This bill would further require courts to consider life imprisonment for manslaughter committed in those same circumstances.

These reforms closely align with the work being done on the ground by organizations like the Be the Peace Institute in Nova Scotia. Be the Peace focuses on root causes of gender-based violence, unequal power, rigid gender norms and systems that fail to centre survivors. This trauma-informed, feminist and intersectional approach reminds us that prevention requires structural change, not just punishment after harm has occurred. Bill C-16 reflects the same understanding by recognizing patterns of control and exploitation as violence in their own right.

I am also proud to have served on the board of directors of the Second Story Women's Centre in my riding, which supports women, girls and gender-diverse people across the south shore. The Second Story Women's Centre provides counselling, advocacy, safety and support within its community. I have seen first-hand how many survivors endure years of coercive control, which has never quite fit legal definitions before. Bill C-16 would help close that gap by aligning the Criminal Code with the realities that survivors and frontline workers have always understood. It would modernize the offence of criminal harassment. It would remove the requirement that a victim must prove they subjectively fear for their safety, and replace it with a reasonable personal standard.

This change matters. It matters deeply for victims who are stalked, monitored or intimidated, and for those whose fears have been minimized or questioned in the past.

● (1355)

In terms of my being an educator of youth, under the second pillar, Bill C-16 would strengthen protections for children and youth, particularly in an increasingly digital world. As a former educator, I want to speak clearly about this. In classrooms, we see the consequences of online exploitation every day: anxiety, shame, isolation and fear.

*Statements by Members*

The bill would update the Criminal Code to address harms that barely existed when many of our laws were written. It would expand the offence of non-consensual distribution of intimate images to include AI-generated sexual deepfakes, recognizing how technology is being weaponized against young people, especially young girls. It would criminalize threats to distribute sexual abuse material. It would directly address sextortion, which is one of the fastest-growing forms of online exploitation of children.

Bill C-16 would also expand child-luring and sextortion offences. It would create a new offence for recruiting a person under 18 into criminal activity. This is something I have seen hands-on, with boots on the ground, during my time as a principal. The bill seeks to strengthen mandatory reporting and data-driven preservation obligations for online service providers. These measures reflect how predators groom, manipulate and exploit children today, often across multiple platforms and jurisdictions. The bill would restore mandatory minimum penalties for child sexual offences while adding a safety-valve clause to ensure constitutional fairness. This would respond to years of legal uncertainty that weakens deterrence and accountability for the most serious crimes committed against children.

The third pillar of Bill C-16 focuses on strengthening victims' rights. The bill would enhance the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights by affirming that victims be treated with respect, courtesy, compassion and fairness. "Fairness" is a key word. The bill would provide victims with information proactively, without requiring them to navigate complex systems or make formal requests. It would expand access to testimonial aids, clarify victims' rights in order to protect impact statements at sentencing and parole, and improve information sharing under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

These changes respond directly to what victims have been telling us on all sides of this chamber: The justice system can be retraumatizing, confusing and isolating. Organizations in my riding like Thriving Together, a grassroots non-profit working in southwestern Nova Scotia, see this every day. Thriving Together supports individuals and families affected by gender-based violence, addiction and human trafficking, recognizing—

• (1400)

**The Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt the member.

The member will have an opportunity to finish her speech and answer questions after question period.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### JESSE FLIS

**Karim Bardeesy (Taiaiko'n—Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour a long-time member of this House, Jesse Flis, who died earlier this month at the age of 92.

Jesse lived to serve. Born in Saskatchewan to Polish immigrant parents, for more than two decades he served our community as an

educator, including as principal of Argentina Public School, now Garden Avenue Junior Public School, in our riding.

In 1979, Jesse heard the call to public service. He was elected four times to serve the people of Parkdale—High Park. In his almost 15 years as our Liberal member of Parliament, Jesse was a champion of human rights, in particular, for the emancipation of Polish people during their struggle against communism. He was a driving force for the recognition of National Flag of Canada Day, for a flag whose 61st birthday we will celebrate on February 15.

After his retirement, Jesse served as chair of Copernicus Lodge on Roncesvalles Avenue, serving seniors, especially of Polish background, with their health care needs.

Jesse did all things in our riding and in this place with a strong spirit of mutual respect and a love of Canada. He leaves his wife, Sophie, and a large family, including his eight great-grandchildren. With them, we share our condolences and our thanks for sharing Jesse Flis with us.

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### 65TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

**Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on February 4, my parents, Abe and Susan Epp, will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary.

The world has changed in extraordinary ways since 1961. Humanity has landed on the moon and has survived the Cold War, Canada adopted its flag, and global adoption of the Internet and mobile phones has transformed how people connect, work and understand the world. Daily life today would be nearly unrecognizable to the young couple who began their journey all those years ago.

Changes often arrive faster than anyone expects. While technology and all facets of society have shifted, my parents built a life rooted in commitment, adaptability and love. Their story reminds us that while the world may change at breathtaking speed, the values that truly matter, partnership, resilience and care for one another, can endure and still give us hope and optimism for what lies ahead.

I ask my colleagues to please join me as I congratulate my parents on 65 years of space travel, smart phones and surviving each other.

*Statements by Members***WILLIAM JOSEPH SEIFRIED**

**Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour a hero, William Joseph Seifried.

Bill joined the army at 18 and trained as a gunner at Petawawa, but when he deployed to London, England, new recruits were made infantry. Bill became a Regina Rifle and, without training, was sent to the front in France. He fought through France, Belgium and the Netherlands and then served as a reconnaissance scout in Germany. By quickly returning a grenade, Bill saved his platoon at the Leopold Canal.

In peace as in war, Bill's service and kindness never wavered. He gave his all to his family, his community and his comrades at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 234, where he was a member for 78 years.

In 2024, Bill proudly represented the Regina Rifles at the unveiling of a rifleman statue in Normandy with Her Royal Highness Princess Anne.

On May 3, 2025, he celebrated his 100th birthday at the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands. Seeing this country peaceful touched him deeply.

On December 22, Bill passed away. Canada thanks William Joseph Seifried. We remember.

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**HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN**

**Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I rise in solidarity with the brave people of Iran.

Over the past few weeks, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have joined solidarity rallies across the country, including in Richmond Hill, where tens of thousands have gathered, braving the cold winter storms to stand on the side of freedom.

In recent weeks, tens of thousands of Iranians have been massacred, with many more injured and arrested by a regime that rules through fear: the fear of speaking, assembling and simply being free. Yet despite the executions, the beatings, the blackouts and the bullets, the Iranian people continue to stand. They refuse to be silenced, knowing the cost but believing freedom is worth it.

The regime can shut down the Internet, but it cannot shut down courage. It can imprison demonstrators, but it cannot imprison hope. Yet here at home, the Liberals offer empty words instead of action. The people of Iran are not alone. The world sees them. Canada's Conservatives and Canadians stand with them. Their struggle is just, their sacrifice will not be in vain, and their future belongs to them, not the tyrants.

Today, the world watches. Tomorrow rises a free Iran, an Iran whose future belongs to its people.

• (1405)

**The Speaker:** I would remind the member that we are not supposed to be using props.

[Translation]

**GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

**Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after a few weeks away in our ridings and after a break from the parliamentary session, we are back in the House of Commons ready for a new year of work. I wish all my colleagues in the House a happy new year.

In 2025, we delivered concrete results: a more resilient economy, strategic investments to strengthen our industries and clear measures to protect Canada's interests. We made a choice to act. We are strengthening our economic sovereignty and supporting innovation here at home.

As this session resumes, the message is simple: We will carry on. We will carry on investing, we will carry on protecting our country, and we will carry on building Canada strong.

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[English]

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe for not letting the Prime Minister sacrifice canola and pulse producers. Saskatchewan farmers know that market access to China has been low on the list of priorities for the Liberals. Thankfully, the premier understands a simple truth. If we want to grow the Canadian economy, we must sell to the world. While the premier has done his part, the same cannot be said for the Liberal government. Trade deals are as strong as the logistic networks supporting them. Exporters continue to face congested ports, limited rail capacity and aging infrastructure.

Years of underinvestment and regulatory delays have made Canada an unreliable supplier in the eyes of our trading partners. If the Prime Minister truly believes in expanding access to global markets, he must commit to serious, sustained modernization of our ports, rails and export infrastructure. Saskatchewan knows how to sell to the world. The government must now do its part to expand markets.

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

**Hon. Jenna Sudds (Kanata, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary courage of the Iranian people, who continue to stand for their dignity, their freedoms and their fundamental right to determine their own future. The Iranian regime's brutal use of violence, arbitrary detention and intimidation against peaceful protesters must end. In Canada, many Iranian Canadians are watching these events unfold and are heartbroken, worried for loved ones, grieving for those lost and longing for a future free from fear.

Canada's position is unequivocal. We condemn the Iranian regime's ongoing abuses and are in close coordination with our international partners to hold those responsible to account.

The people of Iran and Iranian communities here in Canada are not alone. Canada stands with them. We hear their voices, and we will not look away.

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### JUSTICE

**Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of Canadians have been reaching out to members of Parliament over the winter break to tell the Liberals to set aside their divisive and toxic Bill C-9 and to stand up for the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians.

I am pleased to report that today at the justice committee, we were finally able to get the Liberals to agree to set aside the divisive bill and focus on addressing real crime affecting communities across the country. Canadians have been demanding real action: fixing the broken Liberal bail system, addressing the rise in car thefts and extortion and going after people who are wreaking havoc on streets in the country, not people who dare to express a religious belief the government finds objectionable. Conservatives stand ready as always and look forward to working to fix the broken justice system in Canada. I am glad the Liberals finally joined us.

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[*Translation*]

### JEAN DORION

**Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec has lost a great patriot. Jean Dorion passed away after a lifetime devoted to Quebec independence.

Early on, Jean Dorion was an activist with the Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale and a founding member of the Parti Québécois. He served as chief of staff under René Lévesque and was responsible for key portfolios, such as immigration and the enforcement of the Charter of the French Language. He served as president of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, where I had the honour of working alongside him. He represented our nation as Quebec's delegate to Japan and as a member of the Bloc Québécois here in Ottawa.

Jean Dorion spent his entire life fighting for our language and culture, and for a Quebec that opens its arms to everyone. On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to offer my condolences to

### Statements by Members

his wife, his five children and all the separatist activists who are now continuing his quest to make Quebec a country.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

[*English*]

### CANADIAN SOVEREIGNTY

**Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to welcome members back to the House and to mark the beginning of the new year.

We are living in a time of profound global uncertainty. International rules are being challenged, long-standing institutions are under strain, and we are witnessing the emergence of power vacuums and growing instability across regions. In moments like these, Canada must be clear about who we are and what we stand for. The House must come together, above partisanship, to defend the sovereignty and independence of nations.

Residents in my riding of Honoré-Mercier have been clear that Canada or Greenland or Denmark belong to them and to them alone. We must stand firm in defence of our sovereignty. Canada will always remain a proud independent nation because, as the Prime Minister reminded us, we have the capacity “to build our strength at home and to act together.” Canada thrives because we are Canadian. I call on all members of the House to act together to defend Canada's sovereignty.

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### GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

**Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister recently flew to Davos, where he spoke to global elites at the World Economic Forum, and he said that a country unable to feed itself, fuel itself and defend itself has few options. Here at home, Canadians need action, not carefully crafted speeches. Food inflation is up over 6%, and a record number of Canadians line up to use a food bank every single month, despite those empty words.

The Liberals fast-tracked Bill C-5 to get major projects built, and yet nothing has been built, and the hope of a pipeline is fading very fast. Our armed forces are under-equipped and in the midst of a recruiting crisis after 10 years of woke Liberal policies.

Talk is cheap. Canadians deserve real action, not carefully crafted words for the elites at Davos.

*Statements by Members***PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, recently I held a town hall in my riding to discuss our government's proposed legislation regarding public safety, including Bill C-14. The discussion was frank, emotional and deeply personal. It was clear that my constituents want action. They are concerned about public safety, they expect results, and they expect Parliament to do its job. Many residents asked why progress has stalled and why bills remain tied up in committee. They are frustrated, and they are right to be.

Our government is responding to real concerns raised by communities, victims and law-enforcement personnel. The delays are occurring in committee, where an opposition party has chosen obstruction over collaboration. Prolonged procedural delays and filibustering do not make communities safer. They do not help victims. They do not reflect the urgency that Canadians are demanding.

Canadians are asking us to work together and to deliver results. Bill C-14 is one important step toward strengthening public safety, and it deserves to move forward. It is time for the opposition to work constructively in committee so that Parliament can deliver the action our communities are demanding.

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**COST OF FOOD**

**Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister delivered his speech pointing out the gaps between rhetoric and reality on the world stage, the reality here at home is that Canadians cannot eat speeches.

Our food inflation is the highest in the G7, and the bill is in: Food costs are now up 6.2%, with groceries up 5% and restaurant meals up 8.5% year over year. The Prime Minister's \$78-billion deficit has turned Canada into the food inflation capital of the G7. Instead of delivering affordability, he insists on blaming tariffs from the U.S., which do not even apply to food costs in Canada. A quarter of Canadian households are considered food insecure, with over two million people visiting food banks in Canada monthly. Now it is estimated that a family of four will pay \$1,000 more this year to eat.

One thing is clear. Only Canada's Conservatives would put an end to the Liberals' food—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]**JEAN DORION**

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish all my colleagues here a good start to the new session. For my part, I spent time in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert meeting with businesses, community organizations, and constituents. They were clear with us, asking us to continue governing responsibly and consistently, even if that takes courage. We proved ourselves to them, and they are proud of us. May the Prime Minister keep up the good work.

As the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, I would also like to note the following in a spirit of reflection. On Friday we learned of the passing of the former federal member for the riding of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, now known as Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Jean Dorion, who left his mark on political life through his commitment to protecting the French language and the public service.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

[*English*]**COST OF FOOD**

**Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has basically just admitted he is failing with regard to affordability. It is so bad that he just had to announce another temporary boost to the GST credit. If prices were actually under control, Canadians would not need another recycled Trudeau-era rebate to put food on the table.

Canada now has the highest food inflation in the G7. Food bank use is at record levels, with millions of Canadians relying on emergency food just to feed their families. A tax rebate helps momentarily but does nothing to address what is actually driving food costs: carbon taxes on fuel and fertilizer, the clean fuel standard and industrial carbon taxes built into every step of the supply chain.

The Prime Minister once told Canadians to judge his government by the prices at the grocery store, but by that measure his policies have failed miserably, and no tax gimmick can hide—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Cardigan.

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**WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE**

**Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Canada's national heritage fair winners. These are projects that highlight the curiosity and learning among our youth across the nation. One of the winning projects, by Cora Lukeman, focused on women in farming. It celebrates the strength, leadership and legacy of women in agriculture.

Let us picture a young girl holding a bag of P.E.I. potatoes. They were grown by her aunt in North Lake, packed by her grandfather just down the road and sold by another aunt in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. This farm-to-table supply chain is rooted in family tradition that has sustained a seventh-generation farm and family for over 150 years in P.E.I. Her grandfather summed it up best. He said, "My daughters are smart. They care about the land and they work hard. That's what makes a good farmer."

Today, one in three farmers in Canada is a woman and more than half of all new farmers in Atlantic Canada are women. They are shaping the future of Canadian agriculture and inspiring the next generation.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

### THE ECONOMY

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve affordable groceries, yet today we learned that Canada's food inflation is by far the highest in the G7. It is rising twice as fast as it is in the United States. Food inflation has doubled since the Prime Minister took office. If it were really due to external factors, we would not be the worst country in the G7.

When will the Prime Minister scrap his inflationary deficits and taxes so that Canadians can afford groceries?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be back. It is only Monday and we already have some good news. It is called the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. This benefit will help 12 million Canadians. I can already see my Conservative friends. Deep down, they are happy, because they know that a family of four will get \$1,890 and a single person will get up to \$950 this year.

The Liberals support this and Canadians support it. Will the Conservatives support it?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, food inflation has doubled since the Prime Minister took office, and it is the worst in the G7. The cheques announced by the Liberals today will not even pay for one trip to the grocery store. The reality is that the average family will have to spend \$17,000 a year on groceries.

When will the Prime Minister cancel his inflationary taxes and deficits so that Canadians can eat?

• (1420)

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we want to express our support for the Leader of the Opposition during this decisive week for him. I am sure that he will be able to convince a majority of Conservative members to support his leadership. We also welcome his receptiveness to the legislation before the House. One of the bills on the agenda is

### Oral Questions

the Prime Minister's plan for our economy; it aims to create opportunities in Canada.

Can the Leader of the Opposition give us a date when we can proceed to a third reading vote on the act implementing—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*English*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve affordable groceries, but under the Prime Minister's watch, food price inflation is the highest in the G7. It is twice as high as in the States and twice as high as when he took office. He cannot blame global factors when it is rising faster than it is in any other G7 country.

The real cause is his rising taxes on farmers—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I am going to allow the hon. Leader of the Opposition to start that question over.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people deserve affordable groceries. The Liberals might laugh that off, but they have given Canada the worst food price inflation in the G7. It is rising twice as fast in Canada than it is in the United States of America.

There are 2.2 million people lined up at food banks. Since the Prime Minister said that he would make groceries affordable, the inflation rate has actually doubled.

Will the Prime Minister finally reverse his inflationary deficits and taxes so Canadians can afford to eat?

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we certainly want to wish the Leader of the Opposition well in this very decisive and important week for him. We know that he will have success at his party's convention.

The Prime Minister's plan to grow our economy, to create a trillion dollars in investment and to protect our workers and our industries from trade threats is before the House in Bill C-15. We take very well the leader's openness to work with us on legislation. Can he give us a date, just a date, in the next words out of his mouth, as to when we can have third reading on the BIA?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of solidarity, why will the Liberals not agree with the Canadian people that we should get rid of all the hidden taxes the Liberals have imposed on groceries? There is the Liberal fuel standard tax, which is 7¢ a litre for farmers, truckers and those who bring us our food. There is the industrial carbon tax on farm equipment and fertilizer.

*Oral Questions*

All of this has given Canada the worst food price inflation in the G7. Our food costs are rising twice as fast as those in the United States of America. Now the Liberals are promising to recycle a Trudeau-era rebate that would not even cover one trip to the grocery store.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know that this is a particularly challenging week for the Leader of the Opposition, but let me help him.

Today we have good news for Canadians. It is called the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. I know that in his heart he is rejoicing, because he has been asking questions in the House, and now we have delivered for Canadians.

All the Liberal MPs are going to vote in favour. Canadians are in favour. Will the Conservatives be good for their word and vote with us to help Canadians?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, only the Liberals would look at the \$17,600 that the average family has to spend on groceries and say that it is a time to rejoice.

The Liberals say that Canadians should be grateful to be lined up in record numbers at the food bank. They think Canadians should thank them for having the highest food inflation in the G7, which is twice as bad as that in the United States of America. They think that Canadians should give them gratitude for having doubled food price inflation since the Prime Minister was elected, after he promised to be judged by the prices at the grocery store.

Why will they not reverse their Liberal taxes and debt so we can—

• (1425)

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Jobs and Families.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the benefit is good news for Canadians who are struggling today. In fact, there will be up to \$1,900 more for a Canadian family to help with those costs of living, which the Conservatives have been talking about all fall. The MP for Edmonton Manning told a story about Enide, who was struggling with the cost of groceries. Is he going to vote against Enide's desire to have more money to buy groceries?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Enide and his family are paying a record-high price. If Enide is part of a family of four, that family would spend over \$17,000 on groceries this year. That is \$1,000 more than it spent last year. That is the fastest increase in the G7.

Now, the Prime Minister has revived a Trudeau-era rebate, which we will let pass, that would barely cover a few trips to the grocery store, while the average family spends 17,000-plus dollars.

Why will the Liberals not stop increasing grocery prices by getting rid of their inflationary deficits and taxes on food?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know that the Leader of the Opposition is a bit concerned about the week ahead, but let me

quote the letter he sent us on January 24. We would not assume that he would be good for his word. He said, "If you have other ideas that make food affordable, we will fast-track them." I have good news for him. It is called the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which would help 12 million Canadians.

Will he stand up in the House? Will he be good for his word and support the 12 million Canadians who are expecting the government and the House to support them?

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[Translation]

## CANADIAN IDENTITY AND CULTURE

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Quebecers and French Canadians learned a lot last Thursday. According to the Prime Minister, the battle of the Plains of Abraham was not an English conquest, but the beginning of a great partnership. In his mind, the ancestors of Quebecers and English Canadians rose from the battlefield that morning and decided that they had to stop fighting, celebrate their differences and build Canada.

If the Prime Minister wants to write new *Heritage Minutes*, could he at least bone up on his history instead of rewriting it?

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, English- and French-speaking Canadians have built a great country, the best country in the world. We have created great prosperity through mutual respect for official languages and human rights.

No one, not even the Bloc Québécois, can downplay this achievement. We will continue to work on the issues that concern Quebecers, namely, affordability, job creation and building prosperity together.

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, judging by what the Prime Minister said, the purpose of the ban on French language instruction in the Maritimes, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario was not to erase us but to bring us together.

When Quebecers were removed from power and business, it was for their own good. When the founder of Canada said that Louis Riel should be hanged even if every dog in Quebec barked in his favour, we just misinterpreted his love for puppies.

When will the Prime Minister actually learn our history?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is speaking to a government House leader who is a proud descendant of Scottish immigrants, who studied French in Prince Edward Island, who did his undergraduate degree at the Acadian university, the Université de Moncton, who is living his life in French and who was elected four times in a riding that is 90% francophone. That is what is possible in Canada. Mutual respect between anglophones and francophones makes this the best country in the world. Long live Canada.

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a little historical reminder: There is a reason why these questions are being asked in a Parliament in Ottawa. It is because English speakers chose to burn down the Parliament in Montreal rather than compensate French Canadians who had their farms burned down during the revolts of 1837 and 1838. That is quite the partnership.

The Liberal Quebec Lieutenant defended the Prime Minister saying that it was just a different take on history. History is about facts, not opinions. Instead of defending the Prime Minister's alternative facts, could he not teach him our history?

• (1430)

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I see that our Bloc Québécois colleagues like to talk about history. I know one thing: The Canadians and Quebecers watching at home would rather talk about the future.

I know Quebecers. Those in my riding and those in every region of Quebec want a government that builds the future, attracts investments and supports families. Affordability is Quebecers' top priority.

What are we doing today? We are responding with a Canadian benefit to help families put food on the table. We will always be there to stand up for Quebec and Quebecers.

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[English]

**TAXATION**

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister asked to be judged on inflation on grocery prices. Food inflation has doubled to the highest in the G7 and is double the U.S. rate. This is a homegrown problem of high Liberal taxes on farmers, fertilizer and food processors, and rampant inflationary deficits.

Today's recycled Trudeau-era rebate will barely cover one trip to the store for the average family. They now need to spend over \$17,000 a year on groceries. It did not work when Trudeau tried it; prices kept rising. There is nothing in today's announcement that will make anything cost less.

Instead of temporary measures, why not permanently scrap the Liberal hidden taxes that drive up food costs?

**Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, while the leader opposite focuses on hanging on to his leadership, we are focused on affordability for Canadians. Our new groceries and essen-

tials benefit will help more than 12 million Canadians with food inflation. That is \$1,900 for a family of four.

It is time for Canadians to tell Conservatives to stop the obstruction. Let us build Canada together.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the plan did not work for Justin Trudeau. I do not know why the Liberals think it will work today.

Earlier today, the Prime Minister tried to blame inflation on global factors, but all other countries in the G7 have lower food inflation than Canada. The Liberal fuel standards tax did not invade us from another country. It already adds 7¢ a litre and is set to rise to 17¢. The Liberal industrial carbon tax did not come from away either. Working families who cannot afford beef know that today's announcement will not even cover one trip to the grocery store.

Why will the Liberals not stop trying to recycle failed Trudeau policies and adopt common-sense Conservative measures to scrap Liberal taxes on food?

**Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of recycling, we have the 2015 playbook here in 2026, and it is just not going to work. Canadians know that the environment, economy, trade and reconciliation are all related. Canadians in Conservative ridings expect better than obstruction and speak-and-spell politics, where we get one of five answers to every problem.

On this side, there are new programs for affordability, economic growth and building big things, and this is a big moment for this country. I invite the members opposite to join us, to see the world as it is, and to build Canada strong.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

**Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is first in the G7 for food inflation. Canada's food inflation has doubled the U.S.'s inflation at 6.2%. Essentials like lettuce, beef, baby formula and apples have all been hit with Liberal inflation. Conservatives will fast-track any proposal that would reverse having the highest food inflation in the G7. That includes eliminating the industrial carbon tax and Liberal fuel standards, cutting red tape and boosting competition.

Will the Liberals introduce this immediately?

**Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is focused on delivering support where it is needed. I cannot understand why the opposition is so against that. By taking action now, we are helping families manage essential costs, improving affordability and strengthening a more resilient food system.

Twelve million Canadians are going to be affected by this. It is going to help our domestic production. It is going to help our farmers and ranchers, and it is going to help our economy.

**Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC):** Madam Speaker, giving Canadians the money back that the Liberals took from them in the first place does not lower grocery costs. The Prime Minister cannot blame global factors either when all other G7 nations have lower food inflation than Canada does. Liberals raised taxes on farmers, fertilizer and food processors, all while doubling the deficit.

Will the Liberals reverse these failed policies, or is having the highest food inflation in the G7 the only Liberal promise they are willing to keep?

**Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, while the party of no keeps standing in the way of bringing down the cost of living for Canadians, we are saying yes. Today the groceries and essentials benefit will give 12 million Canadians support to put food on the table, saving the average family of four almost \$1,900 and the average individual almost \$900.

We are saying yes to supporting families. We are saying yes to making life more affordable. We are saying yes to real solutions. Why does the party of no not support Canadians and start saying yes as well?

• (1435)

**Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said, “A country that can't feed itself, fuel itself or defend itself, has few options.” He is right, and Canadians are looking for the Prime Minister's words to match his actions.

Tomorrow, Conservatives are going to introduce a motion to pass the Canadian sovereignty act. It would cut taxes, and it would let investors invest and builders build.

The question is very simple: At this critical time for our country, will the government say yes, and will it support the Canadian sovereignty act?

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is a bill before this Parliament that would let investors invest, that would let builders build and that in fact would attract \$1 trillion of investment in our country that will protect our workers and build our industries. It is the budget implementation act.

Canadians in Conservative ridings are telling us that they want this Parliament to work and that they want to endorse the Prime Minister's plan to create growth in this country.

Can the member give us a date, just a date, when we will have third reading and pass the Prime Minister's plan for prosperity in Canada?

[Translation]

**Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister seems open to our idea of moving more quickly for Canadians. That is fantastic. He also promised to make groceries more affordable for Canadians.

On this side of the House, we look forward to quickly passing measures to reverse food inflation, such as those that stimulate competition among grocery chains. Tomorrow, we will move a motion that calls for the passage of a bill on Canadian sovereignty.

Will the government introduce a bill to reduce the cost of groceries?

**Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House. I wish everyone a happy new year. This is already a good year for Canadians. Today, more than 12 million Canadians will see an increase in their purchasing power. More purchasing power is what they need to deal with what we are seeing in grocery stores, and that is the goal. I hope our colleagues will support us in this endeavour.

**Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has already said that we are letting that pass. Now, we need to continue and go further. It is time to reward businesses and workers who build and invest in Canada, and we need to protect Canadian innovation.

On this side of the House, we are proposing the creation of a tax credit for reinvestment in Canada in order to stimulate domestic industrial activity and protect Canadian innovation by requiring the Minister of Industry to table a plan to prevent Canadian patents, discoveries and innovations from being sold off to other countries.

Will the Liberals support our motion and introduce a bill on Canadian sovereignty?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to wish everyone a happy new year.

We are working together on new measures to help families put food on the table. For example, in my riding, not only will a single mother get more purchasing power, but she will also benefit from new measures to help her buy shoes and clothes and pay for after-school care.

These are realities not only in my riding, but in opposition members' ridings as well, I am sure. I ask them to work with us and give—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Drummond.

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**CANADIAN IDENTITY AND CULTURE**

**Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it was on a sunny day in September 1759 that the beautiful partnership between the French and the English began. This beautiful friendship, born on the Plains of Abraham, would give rise to moments filled with affection, including the banning of French in schools, the hanging of patriots, the Durham report, the execution of Riel, the Quebec City riot over conscription, the War Measures Act, the night of the long knives, Meech Lake and more.

There are limits to offering a different perspective on history. Does this simply prove that the Prime Minister knows nothing about the history of Quebeckers and francophones in Canada?

• (1440)

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by wishing a happy new year to the members of the Bloc Québécois, that is, the federal militant wing of the Parti Québécois. I think what bothers them the most is that the Prime Minister's message was one of national unity.

Still, I would like to ask them a question. Did they ask Paul St-Pierre Plamondon for permission to ask that question? He has moved on to other things. Now he is picking a fight with Bonhomme Carnaval. We cannot make this stuff up.

**Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, that is wonderful. Rewriting the facts is contagious and rampant across the Liberal caucus. To hear the Prime Minister, it seems that Montcalm's dying words would have been: I die disappointed, saddened not to see the English reach Quebec City. The truth is that we were conquered, and since then the federal government has gone to great lengths trying to force us into submission.

The Prime Minister chose to rewrite history on the assumption that Quebeckers are unfamiliar with it. Instead of spouting nonsense about the plains and insulting our intelligence, what is the Prime Minister waiting for to pick up a book and learn a little more about Quebec? He could use it.

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Quebeckers are telling us loud and clear to focus on affordability, end-of-month needs, rent, housing and protecting our industries, such as softwood lumber and aluminum. They are asking us for broader protection against tariffs and other threats in a highly com-

plex world, and to protect our culture and language. That is what the federal government and the Liberal Party are going to do this year.

\* \* \*

[English]

**TAXATION**

**Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Stats Canada confirms what Canadian families already know at the checkout. Food inflation has jumped by 6.2% in the last year. Grocery prices are up 5%, and Canada now has the highest food inflation in the G7. Newfoundland and Labrador has the second-highest food inflation rate in the entire country. Higher transportation costs mean that local families are hit even harder.

Conservatives are ready to fast-track measures to bring food prices down. Will the government eliminate the industrial carbon tax and the 17¢-a-litre fuel standards tax so that Canadians can afford the basics?

**Hon. Joanne Thompson (Minister of Fisheries, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish the opposition member from Newfoundland and Labrador a happy new year. I want to just give a couple of stats regarding the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, specific for our province. This year, a family of four will get over \$1,890, and over the next four years, they will get \$1,400 a year. A single person will get \$950 with the top-off and \$700 going forward.

Her constituents are telling me they want action. She should stop the obstruction and work for the people.

**Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are ready to work with the government on real, long-term solutions instead of recycled, temporary, Trudeau-era rebates. Canada has been called the food inflation capital of the G7. That is real hardship. People back home ask me how far this has to go before it stops.

The Prime Minister cannot blame global factors when all other countries have lower food price inflation than Canada. It is a home-grown problem of high Liberal taxes.

Will the government focus on actually bringing down food prices, or will it defend policies that make food more expensive?

**Hon. Joanne Thompson (Minister of Fisheries, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will tell members what is recycled. It is the tired notes that the Conservative members, including this member from Newfoundland and Labrador as well, continue to repeat. The point is that they consistently vote against supports that help families and the people in their ridings that they talk about, who I hear from and who want them to support them. They should stop the nonsense, work together and let us grow Canada.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

**Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is now the inflation capital of the G7. Food prices are rising faster than families can keep up, twice the rate of the U.S., and recycled Trudeau-era rebates do not fix the problem. Canadians cannot eat the paper on which this Prime Minister's empty promises are written. Restaurants are being squeezed out of business with higher food costs, and Canadians are cutting back because they cannot afford to eat. Conservatives are ready to work on long-term solutions Canadians can feel at the checkout, like cutting the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standard tax to bring prices down.

Will the Prime Minister work with us, or does he consider the food bank the new order of fine dining for Canadians?

• (1445)

**Hon. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, \$1,900 per family is real money that will help Canadians pay for groceries, pay for schools and pay for activities for their children. Canadians in Conservative-held ridings want to benefit from this support from our government.

Why are the Conservatives systematically blocking every time we want to help Canadians?

[Translation]

**Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, food is expensive in Canada. It is more expensive than anywhere else. There is not another G7 country where food costs more than in Canada. Ground beef is unaffordable: it is 17% more expensive. Apples have gone up by 10%, lettuce by 13%. Oranges have gone up by 15% and ground coffee by 42%.

Is the Liberal government in trouble? Its credibility is the only thing that is going down.

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, coming from a star of *Infoman*, I am not surprised. I really admire my colleague, but he is behind the times. He must have gotten up a little late, because now it is called the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. The people in his riding applaud it. I know that, deep down, he applauds it too.

The real question is whether he will stand up in the House, commend this measure that will help 12 million Canadians and say that the Liberal government is doing good things for Canadians.

**Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, votes cannot be bought. They must be earned.

The latest consumer price index data shows that food inflation has risen by 6.2%, making Canada the food inflation capital of the G7. The Prime Minister can blame the rest of the world, but this is a problem created right here at home by the high Liberal taxes imposed on our farmers.

Will the government agree to immediately introduce legislation that eliminates hidden taxes on food?

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague. We are here to help families, not only with their grocery bills, but also with living expenses, such as child care costs and unplanned expenses. We are asking our colleagues to heed the letter from their leader, who has

indicated that he is open to working with us to help 12 million Canadians.

[English]

**Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when I was back home in my riding, I had many conversations with people in my community about how important the school food program was to families in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets.

Can the Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature please update the House on how the government will deliver real, near-term relief for Canadians facing a higher cost of living?

**Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is great. The member for South Shore—St. Margarets is going to be able to go back home this weekend and talk to families about the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which is going to help a family of four with almost \$1,900 a year. That is going to help over 12 million people right across the country. It is her hard work that is delivering these results. Not only that, we have made the national school food program permanent. There are the dental benefits supporting families, Canada child care and the Canada child benefit. There is such a long list, I could go on forever.

We are going to continue working for Canadians.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CARBON PRICING**

**Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, eating has become a luxury. The numbers are painful. The price of beef is up 17%, lettuce is up 13% and apples are up 10%. Under this government, making a simple salad is like investing in the stock market. Even coffee is 41% more expensive.

When will the government finally stop taxing our farmers and truckers? Will the government commit today to axing the industrial carbon tax and the taxes on fuel standards?

• (1450)

**Hon. Marjorie Michel (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Health, of course I want Canadians to eat well. That is why we implemented this measure today that is meant to leave more money in Canadians' pockets to help them get through these difficult times.

*Oral Questions*

In my riding, a family of four that needs this help will receive \$1,890 this year. We are taking action to help Canadians get through these challenging times.

**Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal announcement this morning is merely a band-aid solution for the 2.2 million Canadians who will continue to rely on food banks. Canada has the highest inflation rate in the G7 because of Liberal taxes, which are killing our local businesses. For example, it is estimated that 7,000 restaurants shut down in 2025, and another 4,000 are expected to shut down this year, in 2026.

Will the government axe the tax on fuel, which is driving up transportation costs and the price of food?

**Hon. Anna Gainey (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are actually helping Canadians with the cost of living by lowering their costs with a rebate worth nearly \$1,900 a year for a family of four. This measure is in addition to other investments, such as the tax cut for 22 million Canadians and the \$800 in savings for families with children who benefit from the national school food program.

We are here to help families move forward. The Conservative Party should get out of the way and support our initiatives.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if we judge the Prime Minister by prices at the grocery store, as he said, he has failed.

Canada's food inflation now sits at 6.2%, the highest in the G7. Conservatives are ready to fast-track real relief by scrapping the industrial carbon tax, eliminating the ever-increasing fuel standards tax, boosting competition in grocery stores and cutting red tape for farmers.

When will the Prime Minister stop offering band-aid solutions and work with Conservatives to bring food prices down once and for all?

**Hon. Adam van Koeverden (Secretary of State (Sport), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Canada groceries and essentials benefit will put food directly onto the tables of hard-working Canadian families and not just a few. We are talking about 12 million Canadians.

Only Conservatives are willing to stand in the way of affordability for families that need a little bit of help. This Liberal government has the backs of Canadians. That Conservative leader turned his back on helping Canadians a long time ago.

I know that Conservative leader is obsessed with his grip on power right now and probably cannot focus on much else, but if he could focus on what Canadians need and helping them out at the grocery store, we could use his vote.

**Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, enough with the temporary and recycled Trudeau-era rebates, and enough with blaming global factors when all the other countries have lower food price inflation than Canada.

This is a homegrown problem, and we need long-term solutions.

My recent visit to Simcoe Hall's Food Bank with the Conservative leader was yet another reminder that more working families are struggling and visiting food banks.

Will the Prime Minister stop treating the House of Commons as the house of elites, and finally work with Conservatives to bring food prices down for Canadians?

**Hon. Adam van Koeverden (Secretary of State (Sport), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is always pretty fresh to hear the Conservatives talk about elitism when they are talking down supports for hard-working Canadians. Twelve million Canadians are going to benefit from the Canada groceries and essentials benefit.

From a personal perspective, when my hard-working single mom got that benefit four times a year, that meant running shoes for me and my brother, that meant guitar lessons for me and my brother, and that meant fresher food and maybe a trip to Swiss Chalet.

However, those Conservatives have never cared about affordability or lower-income families. They are only here to help their rich oil and gas friends with this nonsense on hidden taxes that do not exist.

**Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada now faces the highest food inflation in the G7. The government's responses relied largely on short-term relief measures that may ease pressure temporarily, but do nothing to address the underlying drivers of rising food costs.

Food affordability requires deeper structural action. Conservatives have put forward practical solutions, including eliminating the industrial carbon tax and the fuel standards tax, boosting competition in the grocery sector and cutting red tape for farmers.

Will the government work with Conservatives to deliver lasting relief for Canadian families?

*Oral Questions*

• (1455)

**Hon. John Zerucelli (Secretary of State (Labour), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from day one, our focus has been on lowering costs for families and putting money in their pockets. Today's announcement of the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit will give Canadians the relief they need.

However, more than that, we have delivered a tax cut. We have protected the Canada child benefit and we have grown it. We reduced child care costs. We have cut the carbon tax. We have delivered dental care. Through Build Canada Homes, we are building low-cost, affordable housing. We have made the national school food program permanent.

Voters in Vaughan want this stuff. Why is the member obstructing? He should get out of the way.

**Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if those measures worked, Canadians would actually be able to afford their groceries. Lettuce is up 12%, beef is up 16%, apples are up 10% and even baby formula is up another 6%. After 10 years of Liberal inflation and taxes, Canada now leads the G7 with the highest food inflation. Conservatives are ready to fast-track solutions: eliminate the industrial carbon tax, cut the fuel standards tax, boost grocery competition and cut red tape for farmers.

Will the Liberal government introduce legislation to implement these solutions and to work with us to finally lower the price of food for Canadians?

**Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure which Saskatchewan people the member is speaking with, but the Saskatchewan people I am speaking to talk about the \$10-a-day day care. They talk about the reduction of GST on homes. They talk about the school food program. Now they will talk about the Canada groceries and essential benefit, \$11.7 billion that will help many Saskatchewan families.

Saskatchewan families do not ask for much, just a fair shot and some breathing room at the end of the month.

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**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, soft-on-crime Liberal laws ended mandatory jail time for extortionists and released repeat violent offenders back on our streets. Since then, violent crime has doubled and extortion is up over 350%. Businesses, media studios and homes are being shot at. Literally, we are seeing bullets fly through the bedrooms of our children. Canadians are terrified and feel like they are the ones on house arrest while the criminals walk free.

When will the Liberal government stop making excuses, work with us, take action and protect Canadians?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the outset, let me thank and congratulate the members of the RCMP for their work in the arrest of Ryan Wedding in collaboration with the FBI. Ryan Wedding was the number one wanted person in the United States, and this is the type of collabo-

ration that law enforcement in Canada, working with the United States, can achieve.

To the member's question, we have six bills in front of the House that deal with public safety. The obstruction of the Conservative Party in passing not a single one of them is atrocious. I invite the member opposite to pass these bills today.

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**JUSTICE**

**Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, extortion cases are exploding and it is a full-on crisis. In Surrey alone, police are responding to more than one case a day. Families and small businesses are terrified, truckers are feeling the heat and people feel abandoned by Justice Canada. After years of Liberal promises, the results speak for themselves. Crime is up and criminals walk free. Bill C-5 and Bill C-75 strip mandatory minimums and entrench catch-and-release policies.

When will the government work in good faith with the Conservatives to eliminate mandatory minimums for extortionists and repeal the catch-and-release laws that are hurting our country?

**Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is easy for members to make mistakes when reading a question that was handed to them from their party's whip rather than actually doing research to understand the facts on the ground.

If the hon. member actually surveyed the statistics on violent crime in Canada, he would see that in the last two years, there has been a reduction of crime in this country. The bills he points to actually made it harder for someone to get bail if they were charged with offences touching on intimate partner violence and made house arrest impossible for serious charges, including advocating genocide, torture and murder.

We have put forward a plan that is going to treat repeat violent criminals with serious laws that help protect communities against crime. I hope the Conservatives—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Abbotsford—South Langley.

*Oral Questions*

**Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since January 1, there has been a minimum of one extortion case every single day in the Lower Mainland. These are real consequences of the Liberals' failure to take crime seriously. Families and businesses across Abbotsford and Surrey are terrified, and entire communities are living in fear. It is time for the Liberals to fix their soft-on-crime laws that have failed to keep innocent Canadians safe.

When will the Liberals stop delaying, finally work with us and restore mandatory minimums for extortionists and repeal their catch-and-release laws, Bill C-5 and Bill C-75?

• (1500)

**Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combating Crime), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in Canada, someone who commits extortion can serve up to 25 years in prison. We have the laws in place, but we are going to improve on those laws. That is why we have put forward a bill on bail and sentencing reform. I am glad to see that it is progressing through committee.

One law that could really help these cases is lawful access. It was the second bill we presented in the House. The Conservatives have been obstructing it all along. We had several different summits across this country. What did law enforcement ask for? It asked for lawful access. The Conservatives need to stop the obstruction.

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[*Translation*]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in Beauport—Limoilou and across the country, the cost of living is still too high for many families. Our government has already taken concrete action by eliminating the consumer carbon tax, cutting taxes for nearly 22 million middle-class Canadians and eliminating the GST for first-time homebuyers. However, we know that we need to do more and that we can do more to help Canadians keep up with inflation.

Can the Minister of Finance tell the House about the concrete steps we are taking to support families in Beauport—Limoilou and across the country?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question, because he really showed Canadians all the measures we have taken to help people. Today, 12 million Canadians across the country are celebrating the news of the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit. This will be a major help to families. As my colleague said earlier, it can help a single mother with concrete things such as buying clothes or shoes.

On this side of the House, we will always be there to help Canadians. We will always be there to move our country forward. We will always work to build strong communities.

[*English*]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week was a devastating one for forestry workers and their families on Vancouver Island. Just outside Port McNeill, the Atli Chip plant announced it would be permanently closed, and curtailments were announced at the Ladysmith and Saltair locations of the iconic Chemainus sawmill, where my grandfather worked for 30 years. These were good-paying jobs, the type of jobs that built communities up and down Vancouver Island and right across B.C.

The government promised to stand with these workers, to have their backs. Instead, mills keep closing and workers are being laid off. When will the government's actions and results finally live up to its rhetoric and its words?

**Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government stands with forestry workers. We have announced \$2.5 billion in supports. We have a task force active right now looking at additional supports. I was in Prince George last week.

Members in Conservative ridings want results, and I want to tell members of the House a little bit of a story. The last time we talked about this in the House of Commons, we got suggestions from the NDP. We put them into effect. We got suggestions from the Bloc. We put them into effect.

We got no suggestions from the Conservatives. We want their help. We want to support this sector. We are tired of hearing noun, verb and no solutions every time these guys open their mouths.

**Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a suggestion, and it is to drop the ideological 30 by 30, which stops forestry workers from doing their jobs.

I appreciate my colleague's comments on this issue, and I appreciate the government's promises of support, but forestry workers in my riding and across B.C. cannot eat Liberal promises and they cannot pay their mortgages with a Liberal speech. They need action. They need results. They need the government to actually deliver something.

Literally thousands of jobs have been lost. How many more mills have to close? How many more people have to be put out of work before the Liberal government steps up and takes this crisis seriously?

### Oral Questions

**Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of a more out-of-touch comment than talking about 30 by 30. They are clearly not talking to people on the ground. These are not the challenges the sector faces. We need solutions, not obstruction, from the members opposite.

I am welcoming them to work with us. We want to help them out. We need their help because they are the people on the ground representing the Conservative ridings with these mills. We have not been hearing from the Conservatives. These ridings deserve better.

• (1505)

**Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Ear Falls sawmill has been shut down since October. The Ignace mill is expected to close in March, and now 150 people will be affected by the closure of a line at Thunder Bay Pulp and Paper.

Every day more closures are announced. These are good-paying jobs for hard-working Canadians that are now gone. The government's rhetoric of supporting workers is not matching the reality of the workers who are losing their jobs.

Conservatives stand ready in the House to support government actions that will save forestry jobs. When will we finally see some action from the Liberal government?

**Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, forestry, mill jobs and the forestry sector in Canada are part of the very fibre of our country, the very fibre of our communities.

The parliamentary secretary just outlined the many measures we are putting in place to make sure we protect those workers and those facilities against an ill-advised trade war that will only increase the cost of housing in the United States and elsewhere. We are going to put those people to work producing wood, producing mass timber and building homes. We are going to do that in the face of Conservative—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Labrador.

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### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a proud history of standing with our allies during combat missions and peacekeeping exercises. In my riding of Labrador, home of Canadian Forces Base Goose Bay, many families serve our country or stand behind loved ones who do. When Canada's contributions are mis-characterized or minimized, it is important to set the record straight.

Can the Minister of Veteran Affairs tell the House how Canada has stood alongside our allies and how we properly commemorate and recognize our veterans?

**Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when NATO invoked article 5 after 9/11, we fought the Taliban alongside our allies in Afghanistan. There were 40,000 Canadians deployed, and 158 CAF soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice. Thirty Canadian soldiers received the U.S. Bronze Star for their bravery.

The Canadian Armed Forces have made and continue to make invaluable contributions around the world. As a nation, Canada will always stand with our allies, including the U.S. As Canadians, we stand behind the women and men in uniform who serve.

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### INTERNAL TRADE

**James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every drop of Canada's iconic award-winning Crown Royal whisky is proudly made in Gimli, Manitoba, using Manitoba grains and pure Interlake water. Unfortunately, Manitoba employees and farmers are worried because the Government of Ontario is threatening to pull Crown Royal off the shelves of its liquor stores.

The Prime Minister incorrectly claimed he has torn down inter-provincial trade barriers, when, in fact, he has been sitting on the sidelines. His silence on Ontario's threat to Manitoba is deafening.

Will the Liberals stand up for Canadian jobs and pass the Conservatives' Canadian sovereignty act to remove barriers to inter-provincial free trade?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by wishing colleagues a happy new year, particularly our friend from Manitoba who just asked the question. I want to thank the Conservative Party for its support last June in passing federal legislation in the House that did exactly that. It eliminated all federal barriers to inter-provincial trade.

Now the challenge is to work with our partners in the provinces. The good news is that the Prime Minister will have the premiers for dinner in Ottawa on Wednesday and an all-day meeting on Thursday. We will be discussing exactly those issues of continuing to remove those barriers.

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### THE ECONOMY

**Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, families in Edmonton Strathcona and across the country cannot wait until June to get help with their groceries. In 2022, the House passed legislation and there was an emergency payment done in weeks. Instead of making Canadians wait for months, will the Prime Minister work with the NDP to get help for Canadians immediately?

If the Liberals are interested in lowering the rate for groceries, will they please take the GST off all grocery essentials, finally impose a price cap and tax excess profits to stop Canadians from getting gouged by big corporate interests?

• (1510)

**Hon. Eleanor Olszewski (Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this morning the Prime Minister introduced the new Canada groceries and essentials benefit. I look forward to returning to Alberta this weekend and sharing with my constituents that a family of four can receive up to almost \$1,900 to help pay for groceries and other essentials.

This is the kind of support Canadians are looking for. As Canadians, we look after each other. We are asking the opposition members to help us do just that.

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#### PRESENCE IN GALLERY

**The Speaker:** I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2025 Governor General's History Awards.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 152 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

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### CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act and Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed appointment of Kelly Burke as the Commissioner of Official Languages for a term of seven years.

I request that the nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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### PETITIONS

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I rise on behalf of Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford to table two petitions.

The first is in memory of Mr. Darshan Sahsi. Daylight shootings, murders and violence underscore a broader public safety crisis in the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland. Residents are calling on the Government of Canada to reinforce the process of public reporting

### Routine Proceedings

so Canadians can clearly see how federal, provincial and local governments are working together to prevent further increases in violent and organized crime.

• (1515)

#### SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROJECT

**Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition I present today is calling for an alternate location to a supportive housing project planned for Martens Street across from the Abbotsford Traditional School. Throughout the process, there has been a lack of transparency, public input and considerations of alternate locations, nor has a disclosure of plans been provided by BC Housing. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to cease all funding to BC Housing until it finds a more appropriate location, not beside a school.

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today to present a petition signed by residents of Canada who are concerned about the Liberal-Bloc amendments to Bill C-9 that could be used to criminalize passages from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and other sacred texts. The state has no place in deciding what religious texts are proper for each faith community. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that ought to be preserved.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Liberal government to protect religious freedom, uphold the right to read and share sacred texts, and prevent government overreach into matters of faith.

#### SMALL CRAFT HARBOURS

**Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our small craft harbours are the Trans-Canada Highways of our fishing industry. For the last 20 years, the budget for small craft harbours' capital funding has remained at \$90 million, and it needs to be doubled, at least.

Petitioners call on the government to live up to its election promise to increase small craft harbour funding. I am presenting this petition on behalf of the coastal communities that rely on our small craft harbours.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise for the fifth time to table a petition on behalf of the residents of Abbotsford—South Langley regarding extortion. Our community is deeply concerned about the increasing prevalence of organized crime, extortion, shootings and intimidation in our community. This new year has seen more extortion cases than the number of days that have passed. Recent daylight shootings, homicides and other violent incidents underscore a broader systemic public safety crisis in our country.

*Routine Proceedings*

The petitioners mourn the tragic death of Darshan Singh Sahsi. These residents call on the Government of Canada to reinforce the process of public reporting so Canadians can clearly see how the federal and provincial governments and local municipalities are working together to prevent further increases in violent and organized crime.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today on behalf of Canadians who are petitioning the government to take special note of the Liberal-Bloc amendment that would affect Bill C-9. The petitioners want the government to recognize that the state has no place in the writings of any sacred text, including the Bible. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that must be protected.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Liberal Government of Canada to protect religious freedom, uphold the rights of freedom of expression and of Canadians to read and share the Bible and other sacred texts, and prevent government overreach into matters of faith.

**Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today on behalf of Canadians who are expressing great concern with the recent amendments from the Bloc and the Liberal government in regard to Bill C-9. The petitioners are concerned about criminalization of the reading of passages from the Bible and other sacred texts.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in this country, and the petitioners are calling on the Liberal government to protect religious freedoms, uphold the right to read and share sacred texts, and prevent overreach by the government.

## TAXATION

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise to present this petition, which was originally presented by the former member for Kitchener Centre, Mike Morrice, and brought forward by one of his constituents in the disability community. The disability community, as many members of the House will know because it is an issue that I think is completely non-partisan, wants to see people with disabilities in this country raised out of poverty.

The petitioners point out that since the COVID pandemic, many services for people with disabilities have been offered online. These are more financially feasible, and certainly more affordable, accessible and flexible, yet the tax code has not caught up with this. They ask the Minister of Finance and National Revenue to revise the existing criteria for tax exemption for support services for people with disabilities such that their support services provided virtually would receive the same tax treatment as such services provided in person. Right now, essentially, people with disabilities in this country face a disadvantage in seeking more available, affordable and accessible services because they are online.

It is an honour to present this petition, and the petitioners look forward to the government's response.

• (1520)

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition on religious freedom on behalf of Canadians and, more specifically, the good folks of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Religious freedom is a serious issue, which Bill C-9 has overreached. Simply put, this petition is telling the government to stay out of places of worship and respect the religious freedoms of every Canadian citizen.

## BRAIN INJURY

**Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present a petition today on behalf of members of the Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association.

Approximately 2,200 people suffer a new acquired brain injury every year in Saskatchewan, with about 150 of those requiring significant long-term support. The most common causes of acquired brain injuries include strokes, falls and motor vehicle accidents.

In order to support people living with brain injuries, the Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association is encouraging all members of Parliament to support Bill C-206, an act to establish a national strategy on brain injuries.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**David Bexte (Bow River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to rise to present a petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about the Liberal-Bloc amendments to Bill C-9. These amendments are looking to criminalize speaking and teaching texts from the Bible and other sacred texts. This has no place in our society, which is protected by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are fundamental rights. The freedom of expression and the freedom of religion must be preserved.

**Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to rise on behalf of Canadians who are alarmed by what the government has claimed is a bill to protect communities of faith in this country but that would actually risk further harm to them.

The petitioners who have signed this petition are very concerned about the fact that the government is trying to interject itself into the ability of people of faith to share and practise their faith and to cite their religious texts by introducing a new ability for the government to determine which texts can or cannot be uttered. This is something the petitioners are very concerned about, and they call on the government to uphold freedom of expression and freedom of religion and to ensure that government never intrudes on what people of faith are able to do in this country in good faith.

**Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today on behalf of Canadians who are very concerned about the assault on religious freedom and the assault on freedom of expression contained in Bill C-9, particularly the possibility that people who express their faith and read their sacred texts will be subject to criminal prosecution.

The petitioners remind the government, and particularly the Liberal members and Bloc members, that freedom of religion and expression are listed as not only freedoms but fundamental freedoms in our charter. Therefore, the petitioners ask the government to withdraw Bill C-9 and protect the liberty of all Canadians to discuss their faith and share their religious texts in the public square without government interference.

\* \* \*

• (1525)

#### QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752 and 753 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled in an electronic format immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### PROTECTING VICTIMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege, as always, to rise on behalf of the people of Elgin—St. Thomas—London South and, I will also

### Government Orders

say, as a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and as a representative of an issue that has become a galvanizing one for many Canadians. It is an issue around which I saw tremendous attention, with issues pertaining to justice. We have seen very clearly the rise in crime in Canada over the last decade. This is why today the House of Commons justice committee passed a motion that I am very proud we were able to pass, one that would prioritize the study of bail and sentencing reform, an issue for which there has been a near-unanimous call among large swaths of society, from municipal governments to law enforcement agencies and victim advocacy groups, that something needs to change.

We are talking about Bill C-16. I want to drill down into a subset of crime that has also not been immune to the increases we have seen across the board in violent and serious crime. In particular, since 2015, human trafficking has increased 84%. Sexual assaults are up almost 76%. Violent crime is up almost 55%. We have heard testimony from victims' rights advocates about the ways in which women in particular are disproportionately affected by these and other offences.

We have also seen in recent months a very concerning trend in the way that courts and, in some cases, I will say, even politicians view legal theory and the way they prioritize legal theory above the real-world experiences of victims and the real-world implications of our laws on victims. I want to make sure that everything we do as a chamber that deals with matters of crime and justice is not relegated to the realm of the abstract, that we are not making legal theory the priority of what we are doing and that we are actually putting victims and public safety front and centre.

I spoke before the justice committee not that long ago about the idea of mandatory minimum sentences. This is probably a prime example of where we have seen a desire to disregard victims because of what can often be abstract concepts. I can give a very real and very shameful recent example of this, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, regarding mandatory minimums for people who traffic in child sexual abuse and exploitation material, which was referred to as child pornography in the court ruling, that “cruel and unusual punishment” is the description for mandatory minimums. The two cases that came up in that Supreme Court ruling involved men who each had hundreds of videos and images depicting heinous, vile things that I do not want to utter in the chamber, the most heinous acts we can imagine against children as young as, I believe, four and five years old.

What we saw in the trial judge's ruling on these cases was an application of the bare minimum and even, in one case, below the bare minimum, because they thought that these cases did not meet the standard of what was already a paltry mandatory minimum for these offences, which was 12 months. One of the offenders got 90 days. This is why mandatory minimums have to exist. There is a current within parts of the judiciary in which judges are exceedingly lenient on cases that Canadians and, I would say, the fundamental laws of nature would find deplorable.

*Government Orders*

This is so important because the Supreme Court decided to rule on mandatory minimums in an abstract way. Instead of dealing with the case at hand, they talked about some absurd hypothetical that had nothing to do with the case at hand, in order to talk about why a mandatory minimum for child sexual abuse and exploitation material could be cruel and unusual punishment. In doing so, they undermined the idea that we as lawmakers have to send the strongest possible message to people who commit the worst possible offences. There is no justification for giving a slap on the wrist to someone who abuses children, as a fundamental example of this.

I shared in committee a story that was very personal to me as someone who is a survivor of sexual abuse as a child. I do not talk about it often, because it is difficult, and it is difficult for so many other people who have been victimized by something or other in their life, but I share this so people know there is a human face to these things. We cannot simply look at the perpetrator of a crime without acknowledging the victim. We cannot simply look at the sentence applied to a perpetrator without considering the effect that the person's crimes have had on the victim, whoever it is, whether it is a defenceless child, a defenceless woman, an intimate partner or someone else.

● (1530)

Crime has a collective cost for society. It also has an individual cost. In some cases the scars of criminality, often preventable criminality if the justice system were doing its job, run deep and can run forever.

I will share one example that comes from London, Ontario, where Breanna Broadfoot was killed by an intimate partner at the age of 17. Her family has taken this horror, this tragedy, and they have turned it into advocacy. I cannot imagine the strength someone requires when they lose their 17-year-old and are still able to face a parliamentary committee and face the community around them, but that is exactly what the Broadfoots have done.

Breanna's father, Brett Broadfoot, testified at committee. In his testimony he spoke about how the system itself has a role. I would like to quote Mr. Broadfoot:

...I'm here to speak for my family, and most importantly, for my beautiful and now deceased daughter Breanna. I hope also to speak on behalf of other victims of intimate partner violence, for all the women who continue to live in fear of their abusers because they are still out on the streets after being charged with no accountability for the violent acts they have committed. I would like to share my family's personal experience at this time.

On March 15, 2024, my daughter Breanna was brutally attacked by her boyfriend. She was left with two black eyes, a fractured orbital bone, several other broken bones in her cheeks and severe bruising around her neck from his hands having been wrapped around them in strangulation. She was only 16 years old at the time.

Her attacker, age 18, was arrested on March 15 and charged with assault plus assault with choking and suffocation or strangulation. He was released from custody on the same day he was arrested.

He was released the same day. If we fast-forward, we find out that Breanna ended up dying at the hands of her abuser.

Victims have rights. We have an obligation to stand up for victims and to speak for victims. It was not long ago in the chamber that the House of Commons unanimously passed a private member's bill brought by my colleague, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, Bailey's law. In the gallery at the time

that we voted on the bill was the family of Bailey McCourt, another family that will never be able to undo the harm that it has suffered.

Again, laws bear a level of responsibility for this. It is not the same degree of responsibility that the perpetrators of crimes bear, but laws are meant to protect the most vulnerable in our society from the most dangerous in our society. When we lose sight of that in the creation of our laws, we do not have the ability to fulfill the fundamental and most important role of a government, which is to protect its citizens from harm.

As we look at Bill C-16 and the context in which the Liberals have presented the bill, we see that there is much in it that should be agreeable across party lines. There is much in the bill I am grateful for and for which the Liberal government has actually taken its cues from proposals that we have been championing for, in some cases, many years. This is an example where I do not care who gets the credit; I just want the right thing to be done. I want people in this country to have the protections they desperately need and desperately deserve.

However, we can also point to areas of the bill where critical protections are being watered down, and I am referring specifically to mandatory minimums. When I mentioned the Supreme Court decision regarding mandatory minimums for offences dealing with child sexual exploitation and abuse material, I gave an example of, even with a mandatory minimum being in effect, there being judges who want to do the bare minimum and in some cases go below that standard. That is why mandatory minimums must exist. There is a place for them, and we need to have a law and a judiciary that respect that, because for certain offences there should not be an ability for leniency below what is already an incredibly low standard.

The laws of this nation, the Criminal Code, dictate maximum penalties, so why is it so egregious and offensive to some people to have a minimum penalties? How are these two things fundamentally at odds with each other? It is because when we look at parameters and constraints that exist around sentencing, we understand that there are some penalties where a sentence could be too severe. No one supports a life sentence for speeding or for running a red light, for example. Similarly, we also need a minimum standard to understand that there is no earthly justification to not put someone behind bars for certain offences. I am thinking especially of offences against children, of murder and of some of the other offences we talk about often in the context of rising crime that are continuing to terrorize communities.

● (1535)

Bill C-16 would actually empower judges to ignore mandatory minimum sentences. Mandatory minimum sentences have a very operational word in them, "mandatory", which means they are to be mandatory. They are mandated. I cannot stress this enough. Under Bill C-16 there would be an escape valve. A judge could decide on a case-by-case basis that they believe a particular application of the mandatory minimum in a given case would be cruel and unusual.

*Government Orders*

We have already seen examples where judges in this country have given sentences that were more lenient than what they should have been, in order to protect someone's immigration status. We have seen an example, and this is something our Conservative team has tried to rectify in the system, where someone takes into consideration an external factor, even though the criminal has committed a crime and been found guilty. I cannot stress that enough. We are talking about sentencing. We are talking about people who have already been found to have committed the crime and are now facing the question of whether they will have to pay the time, and if so, how much. However, there are judges who have said that if they sentence someone to a certain amount of time, it would jeopardize their immigration status. That is egregious.

We also consider this in the context where a judge could look at a case and say, as one did in Quebec, that they think that maybe a one-year mandatory minimum for child sexual exploitation and abuse material, which is already, in the eyes of most Canadians, offensively low, should not apply to someone. We know that every single offender in this country who is found guilty of a crime that warrants a mandatory minimum sentence under the law would try to avail themselves of this escape hatch. Why would they not?

Bill C-16 would now say that a mandatory minimum sentence should not in fact be mandatory and that there should be no minimum sentence. We would be baking leniency in, and in doing so undermining the very idea of having a mandatory minimum sentence in the first place.

I would like to share what are the offences we are talking about that have mandatory minimums: aggravated sexual assault with a gun, human trafficking, multiple violent firearms offences, extortion with a firearm, trafficking in weapons, and drive-by shootings with a restricted or prohibited firearm. These are not benign cases. I was just in Surrey, British Columbia, and I was also just in Brampton, Ontario. These are two communities that have had exceedingly high rates of extortion in recent years, and this is something that has actually caused people in these communities to feel fearful.

There is one cudgel the state has available to it when people who are guilty of these crimes are finally arrested and convicted. This is assuming they have not been released on bail several times over, which we know is happening. The one tool available is a mandatory minimum sentence that will force a criminal to be behind bars and off the streets. There are some things we can debate, and there are some things on which there are differing opinions in politics, in law and in policy. However, one thing we can be very clear on is that someone cannot be doing a drive-by shooting if they are in jail; they cannot be trafficking in weapons, trafficking in humans or trading in child sexual exploitation and abuse material online if they are locked up.

This is something that should not be, and to most Canadians it is not, a partisan issue. We have been talking about the calls for reform of our justice system. They have been coming from Liberals, New Democrats and Conservatives at the provincial level. The federal Liberals have been slow to respond to this. They have put forward Bill C-16, a bill that has many things in it that we are entirely supportive of, but we cannot undermine the very nature of why these laws and provisions exist.

Parliament set mandatory minimums for a reason. The passage of the provision would undermine that, as we would be saying to every victim in the country. The mandatory minimum sentences were put in place ostensibly to protect victims, and not just as a deterrent. Ideally, with many of these offences, we want to stop the offences from taking place in the first place, which means we want a penalty on the books that someone would think twice about before they violate.

• (1540)

We also know that the Liberal government has ended a lot of mandatory minimums in the case of Bill C-75. We have seen a series of justice bills from the government that it often claims would rectify a problem, but in the end these bills create a new problem or even a host of new problems.

I return to the testimony we heard from victims and people who work in the space of victims. There is one woman I have had the great privilege of meeting. She has become a tremendous advocate for victims' rights, not because she set out to do that with her life, but because she herself was a victim and saw that she had no one speaking for her. That is Cait Alexander, who has founded a tremendous organization called End Violence Everywhere. I was very pleased to meet her when she was testifying before the justice committee a little while ago. Cait Alexander almost lost her life because of delays in court. She has shared online photos that are so painful to see of her body covered in bruises, scrapes and scars because of vicious abuse in an attempted murder by an intimate partner. That person walked free because of the Jordan principle, because of the justice system's inability to fulfill its core basic mandate of protecting people from harm and punish those who inflict harm when protection and prevention could not happen.

We also heard, to use another local example, from Jennifer Dunn of the London Abused Women's Centre, LAWC. This is an organization I know very well. My wife serves on its board. It is an organization that has been advocating for and providing respite and shelter for women dealing with abuse for many years. I asked Jennifer Dunn before committee about some of the reforms we have put through that were proposed in Bailey's law. She was enthusiastically supportive. She knew they would support women. One of the things Jennifer shared in her testimony was that so many of the women at the London Abused Women's Centre that LAWC deals with call our system the injustice system. They do not even wish to engage with our system. They do not trust it to have their backs. I would say that is a failing of all institutions. I do not lay that blame on any particular party. I think it is something we need to take as a wake-up call. It is something we need to take to heart to understand exactly how we can pass laws that are victim-centred and victim-focused, to protect children, to protect people who are being extorted and to protect women from intimate partner violence.

*Government Orders*

This is something I have never had to witness in my family, but I know people who have. The more I have learned about this, the more I have realized this needs to be an all-hands-on-deck issue. This is where I welcome some of the reforms and proposals the Liberals have adopted from things we have called for, and some of the things they are doing in Bill C-16. However, if we are to truly seek a law that upholds victims' rights, we cannot embed in this something that undermines the strength of sentencing measures that Parliament has passed, that undermines mandatory minimum sentences, that makes them discretionary minimum sentences. Mandatory and discretionary cannot exist at the same time. That is why my colleagues and I stand ready, as always, to ensure we are reforming trust in the justice system, that it is looking after public safety and victims, that people like Bailey McCourt, Cait Alexander and Breanna Broadfoot will never again be traumatized and terrorized or face a system that either allows it to happen or does not seek true justice when it does.

• (1545)

**Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I do not really understand where my colleague's opposition to this bill is coming from. Bill C-16 restores mandatory minimum penalties, which is something he is advocating for.

We know that every time the government has tried to impose a mandatory minimum sentence in Canada it gets thrown out by the Supreme Court because, in some cases, it can violate a person's rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill C-16 gives us exactly what the Supreme Court has been asking for in those very rare cases. For example, if a 17-year-old shares an intimate photo of a 16-year-old girlfriend with his friend, does he go to prison for 25 years? It is definitely a bad thing he has done. The bill addresses all of the issues the member has just raised.

**Andrew Lawton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for at least sort of listening to the speech, but what she missed was me talking about the fact that by embedding a safety valve, by giving judges a tool to disregard mandatory minimums, we are not actually bolstering or expanding those mandatory minimums.

That is the crucial point that we have to acknowledge, that if mandatory minimum sentences are to be mandatory, knowing what we have seen, such as with the Senneville case, that certain judges entirely desire incredible leniency at the expense of victims and at the expense of public safety. That is what we are talking about.

By the way, I have said good things about the bill, but I also cannot turn a blind eye to things that move us further away from what we are trying to do.

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I have a great deal of respect for him. He does excellent work on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and is a respectable and intelligent man.

I understand his criticism of minimum sentences. As our Liberal colleague said a few moments ago, the Supreme Court has struck them down, and so we are left with two options. The first option is to reinstate the same minimum sentences that the Supreme Court struck down—obviously, doing the same thing will lead to the same

result, and they will be struck down again. The second option is to not impose any minimum sentences at all. That would not make our Conservative colleagues very happy, which I understand.

However, there is a middle ground. We can reinstate them but allow judges to deviate from the minimum in exceptional circumstances. However, they would not be ignoring them, as my colleague said earlier. This option would require the court to justify why the case is exceptional and deserves an exemption from the minimum sentence. With all due respect, I think this is an interesting middle ground. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Between that option and minimum sentences, which we know the Supreme Court will disallow, does it not make more sense to opt for an arrangement like this?

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of working with my colleague on the justice committee. While we obviously do not see eye to eye on some issues, I know that he does have a passion for public safety. I think that is underscoring the work we need to do on this and any other justice bill.

There is a long-standing legal debate in Canada about who ultimately has the authority to make the laws. To put it glibly, I know that members of Parliament are called lawmakers for a reason. It is our job to make laws. It is the Supreme Court's job and the judiciary's job to interpret laws.

We have been very clear that there are certain things that are so imperative that if we have judges standing in the way of what Canadians clearly want and deserve, we should be open to using the notwithstanding clause to protect some of these fundamental measures. As a party, we have been very clear in saying that. Mandatory minimums for child sexual abusers is a prime example of that.

It is very important that we understand that it is our responsibility and our duty as lawmakers to set out Criminal Code penalties.

• (1550)

**Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his great speech on the issue.

Sometimes I feel like we do not see the forest for the trees. This particular bill does make some dramatic improvements, but what it fails to take into account is the last decade of Liberal failures on our public judiciary, but also public safety, and just the crime rates in general.

Could my hon. colleague zoom out a little and talk more broadly about the state of affairs in Canada, in terms of crime and justice?

*Government Orders*

**Andrew Lawton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Peace River—Westlock, my brother's former member of Parliament, for his intervention.

The issues dealing with crime across the board, and not just the crime we are dealing with in the context of Bill C-16, have been rampant. This very quickly became one of the top issues I face from constituents. In fact, after affordability and the cost of living, crime is the top issue that my constituents raise.

We have seen a string of incidents in the communities I represent, notably St. Thomas, where people on bail for serious offences commit other identical offences. The police have been throwing their hands up in the air, incredibly frustrated with this, because they have been calling for legitimate reforms to laws.

In the case of Bill C-16, we know that bad bail laws hurt women, children and people who are very vulnerable to these particular crimes. That is why we are standing up, again hoping to work across party lines to fix some of these core issues facing society and our legal system.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** First, Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. We do not have the new bail laws because the Conservatives refused to pass the bill last year. That is the reason we do not have the new bail laws today.

Let us go on to mandatory minimums. This is what the member opposite says we need more of. That is exactly what this legislation would do. It would put in additional mandatory minimum laws.

The safety clause, as the member refers to it, is the issue. Here is what the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, the member's Conservative colleague, had to say, “the Liberal government could make this constitutional by adding a safety valve; that is, by having a mandatory minimum with an exception to address the very issues that the Minister of Justice has addressed. This is a perfect middle ground. Why will the minister not accept it?”

We have accepted it. Why will the rest of the Conservative Party not do it?

**Andrew Lawton:** I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this, Mr. Speaker. Let me take a step back.

Conservatives tried, in December, at the justice committee 19 times for the government to let us focus on Bill C-14, to allow us to focus on bail. The Liberals on the justice committee denied that while this very member was speaking in this House of Commons asking why the justice committee was not focusing on bail. We tried. Finally, today, we were able to break that impasse and set aside the divisive Bill C-9 to focus on Bill C-14. If Bill C-16 is coming before the justice committee soon, this is also an issue that we agree is very important.

However, I note that we should not be taking our cues from the courts on matters that are so very clear to members of this chamber and to Canadians. We are the ones responsible. We have a tremendous honour to be in this chamber. I have not been here as long as the member has, but I appreciate the honour it is to be here and actually be able to respond to the concerns of Canadians on justice.

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that he tried on 19 separate occasions to work on Bill C-14 on bail. With all due respect to my colleague, who usually works in good faith, I find that comment disingenuous. On the 19 occasions in question, the request was to stop our study of Bill C-9, which deals with hate. I know because I was there.

The Conservatives did not want us to continue working on the bill dealing with hate because they wanted us to focus on Bill C-14. However, the role of a committee is to study all bills and vote on each one. This is true for Bill C-9, just as it is true for Bill C-14 and Bill C-16.

My question for my colleague is this: Can he guarantee that the Conservative Party will act in good faith, that all filibustering at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will cease at once, and that the Conservatives will agree to work with us? They will vote as they see fit, for or against, but will they agree to work together rather than prevent the committee from functioning?

• (1555)

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your great work and it is good to see you after a lengthy winter break.

Conservatives always stand ready, in good faith, to deal with the criminal justice priorities of Canadians. We have been saying that since the justice committee was convened, I have been saying it since I was placed on the justice committee and we have been saying it as the justice committee has worked through legislation, including the bill the member opposite raises, which Canadians have been clear they do not want. We stand in good faith, as always, to deal with the real criminal justice priorities of Canadians, and I am glad we are finally moving forward in that vein. I welcome the Liberals to the team that we have been on for a while, which is the team that wants to get serious about bail.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton Mountain. Today's debate on Bill C-16 brings us to a topic that is both difficult and essential, a simple and fundamental question: Do our laws really protect women and children who are victims of violence as much as they should?

One of the Canadian values that is close to my heart is how we protect the most vulnerable. That is what we are talking about today. We must ask ourselves whether our justice system fully recognizes that gender-based violence is not always loud, that it is not always visible and, above all, that it is almost never a one-time event. Bill C-16 asks us to face this reality head-on.

Over the next few minutes, that is what I would like to explain. Why is this bill necessary? What does it change, in a meaningful way? Above all, why does the bill finally respond to what survivors across the country, including in regions like mine, have been telling us for far too long?

For too long, our criminal law has failed to grasp the true nature of gender-based violence, especially when it comes to domestic violence, which is, in fact, one of the most common forms. Even today, our legal framework focuses on isolated acts: a specific assault, threat or incident. However, in doing so, it misses the point, in that it misses the overall pattern of behaviour that defines most abusive situations. Survivors have made it clear that domestic violence, as I also said earlier, is almost never a single or sudden act. It is a gradual increase of control. It means isolation from loved ones, constant monitoring, financial dependence, humiliation, intimidation and manipulation. When we look at these actions individually, it is already unacceptable. However, taken together, it destroys a person's freedom, security and dignity.

These forms of violence remain largely absent from the Criminal Code. That is what we want to correct with Bill C-16. At the heart of the bill is an essential recognition: gender-based violence is not limited to physical abuse. It also impacts autonomy, freedom and dignity. The reforms we are proposing today are aimed at better preventing violence before it escalates, better supporting victims when they seek help and improving the justice system's response to their reality.

One of the key measures in the bill is the creation of a new offence that criminalizes coercive control in intimate relationships. This is a major step forward. This offence will allow us to recognize that violence often manifests itself through a series of repeated acts which, taken together, deprive a person of their independence, safety and decision-making power. Criminalizing coercive control sends a clear message: psychological domination is a serious form of violence.

The bill also addresses the most extreme form of gender-based violence: the murder of women because they are women. Bill C-16 explicitly recognizes femicide where the victim is female. It provides that murders committed under four specific circumstances will automatically be classified as first degree murder, the most serious offence in the Criminal Code, punishable by life imprisonment with no possibility of parole for 25 years. These circumstances reflect realities that women and girls disproportionately

face, namely, homicides committed in situations of coercive control, sexual violence, exploitation or gender-based hatred.

We also understand that fighting gender-based violence is not just about creating new offences. It also involves making justice systems more accessible, safer and quicker to respond before the violence becomes irreversible. In this regard, former Bill S-205, which came into force in April, was an important step forward and created a new protection order, namely, a peace bond specifically designed for situations of domestic violence.

Bill C-16 strengthens this tool. It could allow justices of the peace, who are often more available than judges in many regions of the country, to hear applications and impose protection conditions of up to two years. For women living in rural areas, like my region, where access to the courts can be limited and delays can become dangerous, this measure is especially crucial.

In my riding, I had the opportunity to welcome both the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Women and Gender Equality. Together, we held round tables with organizations that are on the front lines, every day, working with women and children who are victims of violence.

● (1600)

I want to list those organizations, which do outstanding work in my riding. They are La Méridienne, the Haut-Saint-François Women's Center, Phelps Helps, the CDC du Haut-Saint-François, CALACS, ConcertAction Femmes Estrie and the Lennoxville & District Women's Centre. The discussions reminded us of the unique realities facing people in rural areas, including transportation problems, isolation and a lack of anonymity because everyone knows each other. They also reminded us of the essential role that multi-faceted organizations play in meeting almost every need and in providing support for women that goes well beyond helping them deal with domestic violence.

I want to share something that a worker at the Haut-Saint-François Women's Center said when I showed her Bill C-16. She said that she was very pleased to finally see a bill that seeks to criminalize coercive control, that this is an extremely important step forward, that criminal harassment is one of the most common issues experienced by the people she works with and that it is very difficult to file a complaint and to have the conditions enforced. She also said that court delays and a lack of protection are two major reasons why victims decide not to report what is happening to them. Bill C-16 responds to those exact issues.

Beyond creating new offences, the bill also improves the courtroom experience for victims. It expands access to testimonial aids—screens, remote testimony, support persons—for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and criminal harassment. For many survivors, the courtroom can be a place of revictimization. These measures will reduce trauma and promote meaningful participation in the judicial process.

The bill also modernizes the response to technology-facilitated violence. It increases the severity of the offence related to the non-consensual distribution of intimate images to explicitly include deepfakes of a sexual nature. It also adds extortion for sexual purposes, known as sextortion, as an aggravating factor and increases the maximum penalties for certain summary conviction offences. This recognizes a simple reality: digital violence can follow a woman everywhere, at all times.

Bill C-16 also modernizes the offence of criminal harassment. Rather than requiring proof that the victim actually feared for their safety, it will now suffice to demonstrate that a reasonable person in the same circumstances would also have feared for their physical or psychological safety. This change will allow for earlier intervention, before violence escalates.

The bill would also amend the Firearms Act to require chief firearms officers to deny or revoke a licence when there are concerns related to domestic violence or harassment. The data is clear. Access to firearms significantly increases the risk of death in domestic violence situations.

Lastly, the bill strengthens the rules that govern trials for sexual offences. It restricts access to therapeutic records and simplifies sexual history procedures to reduce delays, avoid duplicate hearings and ensure that decisions are based on facts rather than myths or stereotypes.

Taken together, these changes mark a turning point in how Canada understands and addresses gender-based violence. Although the scars left behind by coercive control are not always visible, they are deep. Digital violence knows no borders and when the system is slow to act, the consequences can be irreversible. Bill C-16 responds to these realities by improving the recognition of this violence, increasing protection, providing real support for survivors and clearly recognizing the seriousness of femicide.

No law alone will end violence against women. However, laws shape culture. They show what we are willing to tolerate and where we draw a red line. When survivors come forward, they are not seeking compassion only. They want a system that understands the reality of the situation and acts before it is too late, as we are doing with Bill C-16.

• (1605)

**Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague opposite on her speech.

I am pleased that we are talking about Bill C-16, because I have a concern about victims, especially victims of aggravated and violent sexual assault. I spoke just last week with one such victim, the survivor of an extremely violent sexual assault by a repeat offender who recently completed his federal sentence and is now out of the system, so to speak. The victim, this woman, is finding it terribly

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hard to feel safe because she cannot get any information, like where this assailant lives, an assailant who, as I said, has been released with very limited control. What I mean is that, despite the availability of an ombudsman for victims of crime, the service is not perfect. These victims understandably experience distress.

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that we are doing enough for women victims of violent sexual assault. How could we improve their conditions?

**Marianne Dandurand:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very pertinent question.

It is completely unacceptable for women and children to end up in violent situations. As I said, it leaves lasting marks and scars that can stay with them throughout their lives. Are we doing enough? I would say that we can never do enough. We are taking a really meaningful step here to support these women, to reassure them, to better help them. We must continue to do more.

I would like to thank the organizations in my riding, which I mentioned earlier, that support these women on a daily basis. They are doing an exceptional job. As I said, it is never enough, and we must continue to help these organizations and support women. However, I think that we are taking meaningful steps to support them.

[*English*]

**Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are so many portions of my hon. colleague's speech that I agree with completely. My colleague sat with me on the public safety committee for a number of weeks previously, and I think she knows that we can agree on a lot of things.

Pretty much all of my colleague's speech was about the things needed in this bill that the Conservatives can agree with. We have asked for these things for probably 10-plus years, I am quite sure, and some of them are commendable.

I wonder if she would comment on the fact that this bill would empower judges to ignore literally every mandatory prison sentence in the Criminal Code, such as those for aggravated sexual assault with a gun, human trafficking and other multiple violent firearms offences that are harming and hurting women in our community.

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[*Translation*]

**Marianne Dandurand:** Mr. Speaker, I think we need to take this bill for what it is: a bill that will support victims, that respects the legal framework and that will not be challenged before the Supreme Court. I think what we are doing is extremely important. I am speaking in the strongest possible terms.

My colleague and I have worked very well together. I think we share the same concerns about women, children and victims of violence. I truly believe we have some good solutions.

• (1610)

**Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. I also want to thank her for saying a few words about feminist organizations. I have also heard that police associations support this bill. I would like to know whether my colleague has heard the same thing.

**Marianne Dandurand:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly have. Not only do police associations support this bill, but so do victims' rights organizations, as well as the provinces and territories. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities also applauded this bill. Yes, police forces across the country welcome the bill. We have a bill that has achieved consensus across all spheres.

I really hope that my colleagues on the other side of the House will support it because there is a consensus across this country.

[*English*]

**Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am so grateful to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, and the government's ongoing efforts to protect children and ensure that child sex exploitation is unequivocally denounced, deterred and prevented.

Colleagues may know that I also have a private member's bill coming up for second reading in a couple of days, the keeping children safe act. I feel that this bill works in the criminal context to do what my bill does in the family courts. It protects children, it gives them a voice and it protects them from coercive control after a relationship is done.

I served as a journalist for more than 20 years. I spent a lot of that time in criminal court, so I know a lot of victims of really heinous crimes. I know that they expect a justice system that does not tolerate things like sexual exploitation, that protects victims and that hands serious consequences to people who commit serious crimes. Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, reflects the government's commitment to ensure that our criminal law is strong, principled and capable of meeting that responsibility.

I will start by addressing the mandatory minimums that we have heard so much about here in this chamber today. I know it has been a controversial topic. I have covered criminal court, and it has been a controversial topic for decades.

Mandatory minimum penalties, for those who are not aware, mean that a judge cannot impose a sentence any lower than the prescribed minimum penalty, regardless of the circumstances. They can impose a longer sentence, but they can never impose a shorter sentence. It does not matter what the evidence was that they heard. Victims like mandatory minimum penalties because they clearly de-

nounce serious crimes. They can be a deterrent for some offenders, but they can also be unfair in some circumstances. That is what we have heard from the Supreme Court. Judges currently do not have any discretion, even if they feel that a mandatory minimum is too harsh for the particular case that is in front of them.

Mandatory minimums risk violating the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They can result in grossly disproportionate sentences. Unlike what we have heard from the Conservatives so far today, "grossly disproportionate" is a really high threshold. It means that it must outrage our society's sense of decency and that Canadians would find the sentence abhorrent or intolerable. That is the only time a judge would be allowed to use this mechanism, because there is no mechanism like this. Mandatory minimums have been declared unconstitutional by courts across Canada, including in child sex offence cases.

However, the government agrees that mandatory minimums can be a good thing. They can denounce and deter some of the most serious crimes. That is why we have these provisions in Bill C-16. That is why we see this decisive, immediate action and these reforms in Bill C-16, where we would amend the Criminal Code to restore mandatory minimum penalties that have been found unconstitutional by the courts. We would do this by including a provision that provides judges the ability to have some discretion. They could order a sentence of imprisonment lower than the statutory mandatory minimum, but in very narrow situations.

In most cases, the mandatory minimum would still apply, but if the court is sentencing an offender for something where the mandatory minimum will be found to be grossly disproportionate, should we just let it go to the Supreme Court to be thrown out and not have that law at all? With Bill C-16, the court does not need to do that. It does not need to throw it out. It does not need to find a mandatory minimum unconstitutional, and there would always still be a prison sentence. A conditional sentence would not apply in these circumstances.

We would strike a balance, as the Supreme Court suggested. This is an approach that is responsive to stakeholders and suggestions that have been made repeatedly by the courts. When Bill C-16 comes into force, all the mandatory minimums that were found unconstitutional but that remain on the federal statute book would be considered restored. They would all come back into force.

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• (1615)

The courts would once again be required to impose mandatory minimum penalties for all the offences for which the penalty has not been repealed from the law, except in the rarest cases where the mandatory minimum penalty would result in cruel and unusual punishment for the offender before the court. It is a very high bar.

I know victims will appreciate these measures, and I applaud the government for finding this middle ground. I also want to say that, as a feminist, I am so proud of this legislation. I am so proud that Canada is bringing this legislation forward. We know that gender-based violence and sexual exploitation are growing in this country. Around the world, they are growing. Online and off-line, predators are increasingly using digital tools to target our children. Bill C-16 addresses that.

We heard about the victims who did not have their cases heard at all in court because of Jordan's principle. Bill C-16 would deal with those delays we have seen in court. That means that more cases would actually be heard in court. The bill addresses and calls out femicide. It addresses criminal harassment and the non-consensual sharing of images, particularly deepfake images produced by AI.

As we have heard, which makes my heart sing, Bill C-16 would criminalize coercive control. I was here in the last Parliament when former NDP member Laurel Collins brought the coercive control bill to Parliament. I remember the impassioned speech that she gave about why we need this law on our books. Bill C-16 takes that private member's bill, the amended version of it that was meant to pass in the House, and incorporates it.

Too many women and children are living in fear in this country. My private member's bill and Bill C-16 address a lot of their concerns, and I encourage all members of the House to support them.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am puzzled about this debate around mandatory minimum sentences. When I read the proposed legislation, it definitely sounded like a back door for judges to be able to determine, with respect to a situation in front of them, that it would amount to cruel and unusual punishment to impose the minimum sentence. That is exactly the argument that judges have been using all along to declare mandatory minimum sentences to be unconstitutional. Therefore, I do not know how we are getting any further ahead, with this legislation, in handling the challenge that the court has thrown at us.

**Lisa Hefner:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to explain. It has not been happening all over. It has been happening at the Supreme Court when a case comes to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court decides that we cannot have a mandatory minimum sentence if it is too broad, if it encompasses a situation where Canadians would find it abhorrent for the mandatory minimum sentence to be applied.

It is a very high bar. A case the Supreme Court talked about, for example, was if a 17-year-old shared an intimate picture of his 16-year-old girlfriend with a friend. It is a terrible thing. It is illegal and he should not do that, but should he spend his entire life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years? Most Canadians would say no, and that is why the Supreme Court said that we need

to have an off-ramp. We need to give judges discretion. They have to be able to hear all of the evidence.

In the worst cases, yes, we need a mandatory minimum. We need people to know that these crimes are intolerable in Canada. However, for those cases, if we want the Supreme Court not to throw out the mandatory minimum penalties, we need this off-ramp.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois agrees with Bill C-16 as a whole. It includes several of our recommendations.

We see that the Liberals want to strengthen certain laws in order to undercut the Conservatives. For example, we rose several times on the issue of the Jordan decision because prosecutions for serious crimes, like murder or sexual assault, were dropped as a result of delays. Fortunately, Bill C-16 will help establish the conditions for going over the deadlines set out in the Jordan decision.

Why did the government wait so long before taking action?

**Lisa Hefner:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the government waited. I believe that the government was already working on it in the previous Parliament. However, there is an opposition that does not want us to pass legislation in this country. That is why, to date, we have not been able to get this bill passed.

[*English*]

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, as we debate Bill C-16 and turn to mandatory minimums, I am concerned. As someone who stood in the House repeatedly to oppose the mandatory minimums brought in during the Harper administration in, at that time, Bill C-10, I remember going through the academic articles and the reviews by experts in criminal law. One of the things they found throughout the United States, where mandatory minimums were used widely, was that it did not deter criminal activity. It actually overcrowded jails. It was not working to deter criminal activity.

Does the member know if, in doing this, it is in response to a rallying cry that is more partisan-based or whether it is evidence-based?

**Lisa Hefner:** Mr. Speaker, I was not involved in the drafting of this bill, but I am certain it was evidence-based. We do know that Canadians want mandatory minimums when they are appropriate and that they can deter crimes.

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I have sat in criminal courts too long not to understand the member's skepticism and to feel it a bit. It is hard to imagine that a criminal would be deterred from committing a horrific crime if they know the sentencing threshold if they get caught. It is hard to imagine. The principle in court, I believe, is that a mandatory minimum can denounce a crime and also deter it from happening.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I rise with a very heavy heart to share with members on all sides that our dear friend, Kirsty Duncan, has passed.

I thought it would be most appropriate for the House to have a moment of silence, in love and prayers, and to offer our condolences.

\* \* \*

**HON. KIRSTY DUNCAN**

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I would invite all members to rise and observe a moment of silence in memory of our late colleague, Kirsty Duncan.

*[A moment of silence observed]*

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I will say on behalf of all parliamentarians that we send our deepest love and respect to Kirsty's loved ones and family on her passing. I know that those of us who had the privilege of serving with her in this place will never forget her hard work, her courage, her compassion and, above all, her kindness.

We send our love and support to all who knew Kirsty Duncan.

\* \* \*

● (1625)

**PROTECTING VICTIMS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts in relation to criminal and correctional matters (child protection, gender-based violence, delays and other measures), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to rise in the House today on behalf of my resilient neighbours in Oshawa.

As this is the first sitting day back in the House of Commons, I want to wish everyone here a happy new year and thank the many Oshawa residents, community organizations and local businesses I had the privilege of spending time with over the winter break, listening, learning and reconnecting. Those conversations were not brief or superficial. They were long, honest and deeply personal. They spoke to me as parents and grandparents, as workers, and as neighbours who care deeply about the future of our community. Those conversations will also continue to guide my work here as I focus on the issues that matter most to the people I represent.

Across those conversations, one concern was raised consistently and without hesitation, and that concern was public safety. Families in Oshawa are worried about violent crime. Seniors are worried about repeat offenders being released back into their neighbourhoods. Women are worried about intimate partner violence, online exploitation and whether the justice system will truly protect them.

Quite frankly, they have lost faith in our failing so-called justice system.

These concerns are not theoretical; they are not driven by headlines alone. They are grounded in lived experience and in what people are seeing happen around them every single day. However, we must note that these concerns did not appear overnight. They are the result of deliberate political choices made by the Liberal government over more than a decade. It is in that real and lived context that I rise today to speak to Bill C-16.

Canadians are not judging this Parliament by the titles of our bills or the intentions behind our bills. They are judging us by the results they see in their daily lives. They are judging us by whether they feel safer today than they did 10 years ago. For far too many Canadians, the honest answer is no.

After a decade of Liberal catch-and-release bail policies, the repeal of mandatory minimum sentences and a series of laws that consistently place the interests of offenders ahead of those of victims, Canadians are understandably concerned and afraid. Since 2015, under the Liberal government, human trafficking has increased by 84%, sexual assaults are up nearly 76% and violent crime overall has increased by almost 55%. Those numbers are staggering. They are not abstract statistics pulled from thin air but represent real people in our communities. They represent victims whose lives have been changed forever, families whose sense of safety has been shattered, and communities that no longer feel protected by the justice system that is supposed to serve them.

When violent crime rises by more than half in less than a decade, that is not bad luck; it is policy failure. Crime did not rise by accident. It rose after the Liberals introduced bail reform, their version of it, which actually weakened bail, repealed mandatory minimum sentences and repeatedly signalled that incarceration should be the last resort, even for serious and violent offenders.

When a government lowers consequences, crime rises and Canadians are forced to live with the results of that approach every day. This is the backdrop against which Bill C-16 must be assessed.

I want to pause here to speak directly about what rising crime looks like in Oshawa, because national statistics tell only part of the story. Oshawa is my home, where I was born and raised and where I have raised my children. Our neighbours still believe in looking out for one another. Oshawa is a community built on hard work, responsibility and fairness, and it is a community that deserves to feel safe.

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• (1630)

Over the past several years, that sense of safety has been steadily eroding. Parents tell me they think twice before letting their children walk to school or play outside. Over the break, I learned of a couple of teenagers up the street from where I live and where my daughter walks to school, who were brutally attacked by an older teenager who is about 16 or 17. Mothers are crying on the phone with me for almost an hour as they talk about their children's brutal attack and stabbing and not knowing whether their assailant is back out or whether their child can walk safely up the street, the same street my child walks up to her high school. Seniors tell me they no longer feel comfortable answering the door unless they are expecting someone. Small business owners speak about theft, vandalism and break-ins that were once rare but are now routine in the Oshawa downtown core.

What troubles people most is not that the crime has increased, but that the same offenders seem to return again and again. Oshawa residents see individuals arrested on serious charges and released back into the community with little delay, and victims retraumatized when offenders cycle through the system. When I speak with officers and civilian members of the Durham Regional Police Service in Oshawa, they speak with professionalism and dedication, but also with a great deal of frustration. They do their job, make arrests and answer the life-changing calls of so many, but often they see the same individuals back on the street shortly after, not because the police failed but because Liberal policy made accountability optional. This is not the fault of frontline officers; it is the result of decisions made in the House by the Liberal government.

The government claims this bill is about protecting victims. Canadians have heard that promise before, have we not? We heard it when the Liberals passed, for instance, Bill C-75, which made it easier for repeat and violent offenders to obtain bail. We heard it again when the Liberals repealed mandatory minimum sentences for firearms and drug trafficking offences through Bill C-5. Each time, the result was the same: More offenders were released, more victims were terrorized and there was more fear in our communities.

The creation of a new offence targeting coercive or controlling conduct in intimate relationships is sensible and a preventive measure. It finally acknowledges what victims and frontline workers have known, which is that abuse rarely begins with a single act of violence. It usually escalates over time. It isolates and controls, and when governments intervene earlier, lives can be saved. What took the government so long?

We also support making the murder of an intimate partner automatically first-degree murder, a reform proposed by my Conservative colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola in his private member's bill, Bill C-225, which I proudly jointly seconded. This change acknowledges the seriousness of the epidemic of intimate partner violence and the reality that these crimes are rarely spontaneous.

The bill's expansion of the offence prohibiting the non-consensual distribution of intimate images to include sexually explicit deep-fakes is also welcome. This measure is similar to the measures first proposed in Bill C-216, which was introduced by my conservative

colleague for Calgary Nose Hill, and it would respond to the growing misuse of technology to humiliate, control and exploit victims, particularly women and girls.

Strengthening mandatory reporting requirements for child sexual exploitation material also builds on work originally done by a previous Conservative government and reflects a shared commitment to protecting children from the most horrific forms of abuse imaginable. Conservatives agree that these measures are positive, necessary and deserve support, but they do not excuse what comes next. Bill C-16 includes a sweeping change that would allow judges to impose sentences below mandatory minimum penalties for nearly all Criminal Code offences, except murder and high treason. These mandatory minimum penalties are not, then, worth the paper they are written on, because they are not really mandatory at all. In practical terms, mandatory minimum sentences could result in lighter sentences for serious and repeat offenders over time.

• (1635)

Weakening those penalties sends a message, whether the government admits it or not, that accountability is negotiable. Criminals pay attention to that message. The Liberals would like Canadians to believe this change is narrow and very technical, but it is not; it is part of a consistent pattern. The government has repeatedly chosen to make the system more lenient on offenders while communities pay the price. Warnings from police chiefs, police associations, provincial governments and victims' advocates have been repeated hundreds of times and ignored just as often.

Parliament has a responsibility to stand with victims. Public safety is not a theoretical construct. It is when a woman feels safe walking home after her shift; it is when parents trust that violent offenders will not be released back into their communities; it is when my neighbours in Oshawa believe their government takes their safety seriously, and I promise that they just do not believe the government takes their safety seriously. Each time concerns were raised, the Liberals dismissed them; each time crime rose, they denied responsibility; and each time Canadians felt less safe, they were told to trust the same approach that caused the problem in the first place.

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I want to speak now not only as a member of Parliament but as a mom. Like every parent in this country, I worry about the world my children are growing up in. I worry about whether they will be safe walking to school, riding public transit or navigating an online world that can be just as dangerous as the streets. We want our children to grow up in a country where laws protect the innocent, where laws protect the victims and not the criminals, where criminals face real consequences and where safety is not something we have to think about every time our children leave the house and walk to school. When violent crime rises, when offenders are repeatedly released and when penalties are weakened, it is families who pay the price, it is members who lie awake at night worrying, and it is parents who feel they must constantly shield their children from dangers that government policy has simply made worse.

I also want to take a moment to speak to my neighbours in Oshawa. When people ask how we arrived at this moment, how crime has been allowed to rise year after year after year, the answer is not complicated: It is this same Liberal Party, it is the same government and it is this same set of choices. The policies that weakened bail, repealed mandatory minimum sentences and prioritized ideology over public safety did not end with Justin Trudeau. They continue today under the current Liberal Prime Minister, defended by this very familiar Liberal cabinet and guided by the same approach.

Canadians were told that if they waited, things would improve. Conservatives have offered bill after bill, idea after idea and motion after motion that would protect Canadians, and the Liberal government, time and time again, said, “No, no; that’s a bad idea. Just wait, because we are going to come up with the best thing you have ever seen. Just wait, and we will look after you.” After 10 years of waiting, Canadians are tired. They are tired of waiting to see if the government is going to have their backs. Police officers have our backs every day, and they are also tired of waiting to see if the government will have their backs, because it does not.

The people of Oshawa measure governments by results, not reassurance. They measure it by whether their streets feel safer today than they did 10 years ago. They measure it by whether repeat offenders are being held accountable or released. On those measures, the Liberal record is clear. For nearly a decade, the Liberal Party has been responsible for public safety. Over that time period, crime has risen and confidence has fallen. At some point, it is no longer credible to call that coincidence. It is simply cause and effect.

● (1640)

When the same party continues to govern, Canadians are entitled to ask what exactly is supposed to change if nothing else does, especially as our Conservative team has, as I have said, proposed countless measures in this House and at committee to increase public safety. However, the Liberals continue to opt out, delay or vote down these measures. What have they been waiting for? How many violent crimes and deaths could have been avoided? What is the threshold for finally implementing desperately needed change? What will it take?

The Liberals have introduced this bill, which has all sorts of wonderful things that we have been asking for for 10 years. They brought it forward with a little caveat that they know is a poison pill and needs to go: Mandatory minimum sentences are not really

going to be mandatory any longer because there will be a safety valve. It is not really worth the paper it is written on anymore.

Parliament has a responsibility to stand with victims. That responsibility does not end with good intentions or a well-worded bill title. A bill cannot claim to protect victims while at the same time weakening the consequences for those who harm them. A government cannot claim to be tough on crime while repeatedly making life easier for criminals. The Liberals cannot have both.

Conservatives believe there is a better path forward. Parliament should pass the victim-focused measures that have broad support and real merit, and it should remove the provisions that weaken sentencing and continue the Liberal soft-on-crime agenda. I honestly do not know why these folks have this soft-on-crime agenda. It does not make a lot of sense to me.

One time I was sitting beside the Leader of the Opposition here in this House. I was listening to him as he was asking questions and the government came back with answers. I said to him, “I do not understand. Do they not see what is happening in our communities? Do they not care?” That is what I kept coming back to. It just feels like the Liberals do not care. Every time they take two steps forward, or one step forward, they seem to take two steps back. There are great provisions, things we want to see, but at the same time the Liberals are making life easier for criminals and giving unelected judges roles they are not supposed to have.

We believe there is a better path forward. Parliament should pass the victim-focused measures that have broad support and real merit, and it should remove the provisions that weaken sentencing and continue this Liberal soft-on-crime agenda.

Canadians deserve a justice system, not an injustice system. We deserve a justice system that deters crime, delivers real consequences and finally puts victims first. Until that happens, Conservatives will continue to hold the government accountable for the crime and chaos that it has created.

● (1645)

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I disagree with a lot of what the member across the way has said. In good part, it is very misleading to Canadians.

*Government Orders*

If we take a look at the crime agenda that the Prime Minister and this government have brought in since the last election, I would challenge her to tell me when the last time was that we had such substantial legislation. We have not one, two or three pieces of legislation, but we are probably talking somewhere in the realm of four or five pieces of legislation that deal with making our communities safer.

The Conservative Party of Canada is preventing the legislation from passing. The best example of that is the bail reform legislation. I stood in my place back in December, begging for leave and asking for us to stay late into the evening so that we could have the necessary debates. We could have already passed the bail reform legislation.

If the member opposite truly wants to make our communities safer, then why does the Conservative Party continue to prevent substantive legislation from passing?

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Quite frankly, it was expected. I knew it would be coming from him and I was prepared with these few thoughts.

On this side of the House, we feel it is very rich for the Liberals to say that we are holding back progress on public safety when for 10 years the opposition put forward motion after motion, private member's bill after private member's bill, and amendments at committees to make our public more safe and for 10 straight years they have continued to shoot them down.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her speech.

I want to talk to her about one specific aspect of Bill C-16, which is a bill that we support. There is one measure that I believe will make a difference, and it involves criminal harassment.

I was a legal aid lawyer for 10 years. I had clients who came to me who were victims of criminal harassment. However, because of the way the offence is currently worded in the Criminal Code, in order for a charge to be laid, the harasser had to know that my client feared for her safety. I had to write a formal notice, find the perpetrator's address and send it to him, saying that my client feared for her safety and that he had to stop or else there would be further penalties.

Women are often the victims of harassment. This bill will allow women who are victims of harassment to go directly to the police and have charges laid. This will ultimately reduce the victims' suffering and also give them a sense of freedom, because victims often felt trapped.

Does my colleague agree that this is a step forward for victims of criminal harassment?

[*English*]

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that this is a step forward. I think it is very important that we take people at their word. It reminds me of legislation the previous member for Oshawa tried to bring forward in this House regarding human trafficking and convicting human traffickers. The Crown had to

prove that the victim felt fear in order to get a conviction. We have such a low conviction rate on human trafficking because we cannot prove the victim felt fear. This bill very much parallels that. I hope if a bill like that comes forward again in this Parliament, the member will support it.

**Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her great speech. It was quite touching. I hear the same concerns in my community of Cambridge after the 10 years of soft-on-crime Liberal policies.

In the conversations my colleague has had with people in her community, what has she heard with respect to what is needed for people to feel safe again, especially when it comes to strengthening the consequences for repeat violent offenders, restoring confidence in our justice system and ensuring that victims will finally be protected?

● (1650)

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to ensuring that people feel safe again, I think there is only one thing that will make that happen, which is that, after another election, we have a Conservative government, because we are the only government to put forward the types of legislation needed to protect victims.

The member opposite also asked me a question about when the last time was that we saw this kind of good legislation coming forward for public safety and justice. I would say that it was somewhere between 2006 and 2015, when Mr. Harper was our prime minister, and victims were finally starting to see some of the same rights that criminals have. However, for the last 10 or 11 years, that has deteriorated. People in Oshawa, in Cambridge and in Winnipeg I am sure, simply do not feel safe anymore. They feel like the government is simply not listening.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could share her thoughts with the House as to what she believes the provincial and municipal governments' role is with respect to crime, or does she assert that all of the blame should go to Ottawa?

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, it is typical for the member opposite to place blame on the provinces and municipalities. I believe that 95%, if not all of the blame, belongs not just to Ottawa, but the Liberal government.

**Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting comment by the Liberal member from Winnipeg.

I had a conversation with the Saskatoon City Council. When we talk about the hundreds of millions of dollars in the City of Saskatoon budget, 25% is going to the Saskatoon police department. Members can let that sink in a little bit. We have about 300,000 or so people in Saskatoon, and 25% of the budget is for the Saskatoon police force. It is because of the action, or no action actually, from the Liberal government in the last 10 years that now 25% of every dollar goes to the Saskatoon police department.

*Government Orders*

I would like the member for Oshawa to comment on that, because I am sure every community is facing that.

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely every single community is facing that. Durham region has told me on multiple occasions over the last many years of the astronomical amount it is having to spend on policing and keeping our communities safe in the Durham region. The Durham regional chair and the mayors of the eight municipalities in the Durham region have reached out to this Liberal government time and time again asking it to change its policies on this revolving door that we have. They are not asking it to introduce new policy; they are asking it to please repeal some of the really bad stuff it has put in place in policy over the last 10 years, because it is making their job difficult. I believe the number one thing that Durham region is spending money on now is community safety, and it is a direct result of the failed policies of the Liberal government.

**Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I commend my hon. colleague for identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses of the bill. In particular, our hon. colleague, the shadow minister on this file, proposed a solution, which was for the government to split the bill in two: take the part where we have consensus across all parties to actually get public safety as a priority for victims here in Canada, and move those aspects where there is no agreement, that are going to take longer to debate, to the side.

Funnily enough, the government has sort of a track record of this. We saw it with Bill C-2 and Bill C-12. Could the member comment on this important solution?

• (1655)

**Rhonda Kirkland:** Mr. Speaker, Conservative members of the House and I know members on the justice committee would be happy to see the bill split in two. There are major portions of the bill that we can get behind and would like to support, but we cannot get behind empowering judges to literally ignore every mandatory prison sentence in the Criminal Code. It is simply not acceptable. Splitting the bill in two would make it pass more quickly and efficiently through the House. It is the smart thing to do, and I think it is what Canadians would want.

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** 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 Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Employment; the hon. member for York—Durham, International Trade; the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City, Natural Resources.

[*English*]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it truly amazing at times. I question whether the Conservative Party of Canada today, which is so far to the right, has any shame at all, with the types of things its members say and how far away from reality they actually are.

Back in December, which was not that long ago, I challenged the Conservative Party to pass Bill C-14, the bail reform legislation. I virtually pleaded with the Conservative Party and asked for unanimous consent to sit for extra time here in the House of Commons.

The government went out of its way to try to accommodate it. There was no reason not to have passed bail reform back in December, but there is one reason, and that is the Conservative Party of Canada.

Conservative members talk as if they are genuinely concerned about the crime file. We heard it in the last federal election, but we also heard the current Prime Minister and Liberal candidates from coast to coast to coast talk about the issue of crime and having safer communities.

We have, I believe, just over 60 new Liberal members of Parliament. We also have a new Prime Minister, who talked about and is initiating the hiring of hundreds of new RCMP officers and hundreds of Canada border control agents, which was brought forward by the minister and the government. We have seen participation from Liberal MPs from every region of the country, who are sharing concerns about the crime file. We have a government that has focused a great deal on the crime file because we understand that this is an issue on which our constituents want to see action.

Canadians in Conservative ridings want to see action on this file, and the only action they are getting from the Conservative Party is filibustering. The Conservatives are not allowing legislation that even Canadians in Conservative ridings want to see passed. I listened today when they talked about Bill C-16, and based on the comments I heard, I question whether they have any concept of what judicial independence or jurisdictional responsibility is.

The Conservatives want to talk about minimum sentencing. Liberal members of Parliament support minimum sentencing. All one needs to do is read the legislation. It is restoring numerous minimum sentences. The Conservatives say that they support minimum sentences, which is exactly what this bill does. It reintroduces many aspects to change the law and reinstate mandatory minimum sentences.

Taking a look at the bigger picture, I could talk about Bill C-2. The Conservatives absolutely refuse to pass the bill. They will not even let it pass out of second reading. Lawful access is a major part of that legislation. Talking about issues such as extortion, which they like to talk about, we see we need Bill C-2. They will not even allow it to go to committee.

We also have Bill C-9, which is to combat hatred. The Conservative Party has made the decision that it can probably make more money fundraising by opposing the bill than seeing it become law.

When I talk about lawful access under Bill C-2, I would point out that Canada is the only country out of the Five Eyes that does not have lawful access.

*Government Orders*

● (1700)

I can tell members that a piece of legislation combatting hate, saying that one should not be able to harass people or prevent people from being able to go to a church, a mosque or a gurdwara, to prevent the religious hatred that is being spread, is an important piece of legislation. I have spoken to it, as I spoke to Bill C-2.

I already talked about Bill C-14 and how important that legislation is. The only thing I would add is that, much like with Bill C-16, the Conservatives do not realize the amount of support that is out there in our communities. I can tell members that it is substantial. It comes from every region of the country. Whether it is for Bill C-14 or Bill C-16, there is support from provinces, municipalities, law enforcement agencies, victim advocacy groups and individuals.

The people we represent want the type of legislation we are bringing forward in the House, even, as I said, Canadians living in Conservative ridings. Conservatives need to listen to their own constituents. What they will find is that there is substantial support for changing and making our laws better, so we can deal with things such as violent repeat offenders, which is dealt with in Bill C-14.

It seems to me that the leader of the Conservative Party had a flash, or at least a thought, that the Conservative Party of Canada would co-operate with the government in passing the legislation it feels is important. I appreciated what the Attorney General had to say earlier when introducing Bill C-16, which is that the legislation is not about one political party. It is here because this is what Canadians want. When I was listening to the Attorney General, he was challenging all members of the House, members of all political entities, to recognize the phenomenal effort and work that has been put into the legislation for the benefit of Canadians.

I honestly thought he was being very apolitical in bringing it forward, encouraging members to get onside with it, recognizing that, if one has issues with the legislation, there are alternatives. We can allow legislation to go to committee, where it can be further debated. We are not saying we have to pass it today through second reading, committee, third reading and so forth, but given the legislative agenda, there could be some value, and I would suggest to members, a great deal of value if one puts Canadians first, in seeing Bill C-16 pass.

When I read the article from the leader of the Conservative Party, I had a little flicker of hope that we will maybe see some co-operation. Maybe we will see a different Conservative Party in the year of 2026. It does not mean one has to concede to everything the government of the day wants, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with allowing legislation to go to committee.

What we heard today from the critic for the Conservative Party, who they call the shadow minister, was that they want to take the bill and split it into two parts. That is the problem with Bill C-2 today. They did not want to do anything with Bill C-2 unless it was broken into two parts, yet there are substantive issues being addressed within Bill C-2 that could not be addressed because of the Conservative positioning.

● (1705)

Once again, I am seeing the Conservative Party coming up, through back doors, with ways they can ultimately try to justify their emails that spread information that we do not have a legislative agenda that deals with crime. Let us be very clear that there has been a substantial effort made by the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister, since the election, to bring in substantive legislation to reform our Criminal Code and other pieces of legislation to make the communities we represent safer. There has been a great deal of effort in bringing forward this legislation.

I will quote some of the individuals or the lobby groups on the type of support that is out there if I have enough time towards the end.

The theme coming from the Conservative Party today, and why it is that the members are so offended by this legislation, is mandatory minimums. Let us be very clear that this legislation would reinstate mandatory minimums in a number of different areas. It is not taking them away. The Conservatives tell us that it is taking them away.

I want to read a quote, and I have it here on my phone. The font is a little small for me, but I will try. What is important about this quote is that it is actually from a Conservative member of Parliament, and it is not just any Conservative member of Parliament. It is the member who often talks about justice and the issue of crime.

This member has private members' bills dealing with these issues, and he often says he wants his private members' bills passed lickety-split. He has even stood up to ask for unanimous consent to get everything all the way through the system, to heck with any debate in second reading, committee stage or third reading. He wanted it passed all the way through.

He sits on the front bench of the Conservative Party. Of course, Conservatives probably know who I am talking about. It is the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. Here is what he has to say, and I will put this into the proper context. The Conservative Party—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Oh, did they moved him back?

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, from the Conservative perspective, this debate is about allowing judges in certain situations to not have to apply the mandatory minimum. This is the biggest problem. This is the issue that Conservative after Conservative after Conservative has stood up to speak to.

Before we tabled this legislation, what did the Conservative member actually have to say about it? He said, “the Liberal government could make this constitutional by adding a safety valve”. Members know what a safety valve is, I am sure.

*Government Orders*

The member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola continued, “that is, by having a mandatory minimum with an exception to address the very issues that the Minister of Justice has addressed. This is a perfect middle ground. Why will the minister not accept it?” I think that member, who is held in very high esteem within the Conservative Party, needs to express himself more in the Conservative caucus.

• (1710)

The reason they are in opposition to Bill C-16 is that they are having an allergic reaction to judges having the ability to understand when they should not use a mandatory minimum penalty. We have the debate with respect to mandatory minimum penalties because, as parliamentarians both present and past, we have seen the value of mandatory minimum sentences and that is why we make the law. However, courts, on many occasions, have ruled against mandatory minimum penalties in one area or another, and have actually said that they are not constitutional.

Right away, then, the Conservative Party members are saying, “No problem. That is why we have the notwithstanding clause.”

**An hon. member:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, someone said, “hear, hear.” If they were to use the notwithstanding clause every time there was an issue related to a mandatory minimum penalty, they would have used it 12, 15 or 20 times, no problem. Actually, there is a difference and this is the contrast between the government and the opposition. If I were to use the words of the Conservative member opposite, it is having that safety valve.

Let us understand that there are certain situations that come before a court where a judge makes a decision, and there might be a situation that should be exempted from that mandatory minimum. There are Crown attorneys, provincially appointed judges and appeal courts. Nothing prevents a situation where a judge at a lower court makes a decision that the Crown cannot make an appeal, or it can be brought up in other ways if in fact a mandatory minimum was inappropriately used. They do not need the notwithstanding clause. They do not have to fear independent judiciary by saying, “We do not trust all judges in this situation.”

Therefore, within the legislation, we would restore those areas where mandatory minimum sentences have been struck down. That is a good thing. We know that at least one Conservative member has recognized that. I do not quite understand why others do not see the value of that unless, of course, one believes, as I believe, that once again the Conservative Party of Canada is looking at ways in which it can prevent legislation from passing. The Conservatives are not responding to what Canadians are saying they want.

With respect to femicide in Canada, I would suggest that through this legislation Canada could play a leadership role in the world. This legislation deals with bumping up the crime of femicide murder to first-degree murder. There are other aspects to this legislation that deal with child exploitation.

I spent all my time talking about the mandatory minimum penalties because of the ridiculous comments coming from the Conser-

vative Party, but within this legislation, Bill C-16, we see substantive changes that would protect Canadians.

The Conservatives have a choice. They can either listen to what Canadians are saying or stay with the politicization of the Conservative Party of Canada—

• (1715)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

**Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, something I have brought up over and over in this debate is around trend lines and crime in general. Over the last decade, we have watched mandatory minimum sentences be reduced by the Liberal government. We watched, under Bill C-5, many crimes be hybridized so that human traffickers could just stay home under house arrest. More broadly, I think there is a sentiment that the Liberals are light on crime or not very tough on crime, and we have watched crime creep up over the time that the Liberals have been in power.

I am just wondering if the member has a good reason for why, under the Liberals' tenure, the 10 years of Liberal rule, crime rates have increased pretty much in every measure.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I want to reflect on the last federal election, where Canadians elected a new Prime Minister and at least 60, I believe, Liberal members of Parliament. Canadians want parties to work together in this chamber to deal with the important issues that they want action on. This Prime Minister and every member of this Liberal caucus understand what Canadians want to see.

Bill C-16 is a reflection of what Canadians are saying. This government, which was elected just months back, understands the needs of Canadians, and we are trying our best to work with opposition parties to bring forward and pass this legislation. We just need the Conservative Party to start—

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** The hon. member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj.

**Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it seems a little presumptuous to think that we members of the House can foresee every possible scenario or that we can see things clearly from here that we can establish a rule that would be safe from any exceptions, in any scenario.

The truth is that life in society is very complex, and all kinds of stories are uncovered in courtrooms. If judges are allowed to deviate from a minimum sentence in exceptional circumstances, I believe this is a way of ensuring that justice is better adapted to reality and that decisions are made in line with reality.

Does my colleague not agree that we must ensure that judges retain a degree of discretion that allows them to deliver human justice?

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I am not a lawyer by profession, but I genuinely believe that by having a safety valve, which is what the Conservative member across the way called it, we would be able to see mandatory minimums in our law not only stay within the law books but that it would take away the unconstitutionality of bringing in a mandatory minimum. The legislation would reinstate many aspects of mandatory minimums and allow for that safety valve, which would enable us to be protected by the Constitution. I do have more confidence in our judicial system, in particular our judges, to deal with this issue.

• (1720)

**Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no question that if we speak to Canadians, to folks in Scarborough—Woburn, that they will tell us violence and crime are changing constantly.

Bill C-16 is about realigning our realities today to take on the challenges that we have when it comes to crime and violence. For some reason, it seems the Conservatives want to delay and hold up these types of bills that I would say the majority of Canadians, probably 99.9% of all Canadians, agree with.

Why does the member think the Conservatives are holding up such an important piece of legislation in the House of Commons?

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the best example I could give my friend and colleague is to reflect back a few weeks ago to December, when we were talking about bail reform legislation. My colleague knows full well that we had wide support for the legislation. Provinces, municipalities, law enforcement agencies and all the different stakeholders wanted bail reform legislation.

I remember standing up and saying to members, “Let us pass it. We will sit until midnight. We will do it for the next couple of weeks, if necessary, to pass it.” The Conservatives were heckling from their seats, saying that they would do that. I then asked for unanimous consent. They put their hands underneath their seats, being shy and saying, “No, no. We do not want that.”

The Conservative Party is more interested in what is in the interest of the Conservative Party of Canada than in the interest of actual Canadians. That is why Canadians in Conservative ridings are not happy with the tactics the Conservative Party of Canada is using.

**Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has been voting against Conservative motions for the past 10 years. We have been fighting to protect Canadians for all that time.

This bill has a safety valve. When it comes to mandatory minimum sentences, could the member give us a simple definition of what “mandatory” actually means? If it has a safety valve, is the bill not just suggestion?

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, that is a gross way to try to describe it, in such a fashion where a judge would actually just decide to throw it out.

There is a parliamentary mandate that is given through the passage of laws. I have confidence that decisions are being made. I want our laws to be constitutional. I recognize this and the Supreme

Court of Canada has recognized it; it has thrown out mandatory minimum statements because we did not have a safety valve.

I believe we have a responsibility to ensure that the laws we are passing adhere to the Constitution of Canada and the Charter of Rights. I do not have the same sort of fear. There is at least one Conservative member across the way, who I quoted extensively, who believes likewise. A safety valve is something that is absolutely critical. You should be supporting it and the reinstatement of mandatory minimums that this legislation is putting in place.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I would just remind the hon. member to address his comments through the Chair.

[Translation]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder what my colleague thinks about the part of Bill C-16 that says the government will address the issue of criminal organizations that recruit minors to commit crimes.

I have already suggested in committee that a person who recruits a minor to commit a crime should get double the sentence they would have faced if they had committed the crime themselves. Bill C-16 proposes a way to address this issue, but it provides for a minimum sentence of five years, I believe. This approach seems a bit weak to me.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that. Should we not be tougher on people who recruit minors to commit crimes for the benefit of criminal organizations?

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I respect the position the Bloc has taken on Bill C-16, recognizing that, in principle, it is legislation they would like to see go to committee.

I believe the Minister of Justice was open to listening to the critic from the Bloc in regard to listening and potentially taking action. We look forward to the committee actually dealing with those four core elements of the legislation. There is just not enough time to go into great detail. It tackles gender-based violence, especially intimate partner violence, protects children from predators and strengthening victims' rights. It also addresses court delays. This is substantial legislation.

I would ultimately argue that if we want to serve Canadians and deal with the issue of crime and safety in our communities, and the important issues, such as feminine issues, this is the type of legislation we should be passing and getting to committee, where we could hear what so many others, including law enforcement officers, other jurisdictions, individuals and advocacy groups, are actually saying. They like this legislation and want to see it move forward.

*Government Orders*

The Conservatives need to get on the Canadian agenda as opposed to the Conservative agenda.

• (1725)

**Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on Bill C-16. It is good to be back after the winter break. It certainly got colder. I welcome back all of my colleagues and wish everyone a very happy and healthy new year.

On December 9, 2025, the government introduced Bill C-16, known as the protecting victims act. The bill proposes reforms to the Criminal Code “to protect victims and survivors of sexual violence, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence, and to keep our kids safe from predators.” That is certainly a very worthy goal. I thank the Attorney General for making an effort here.

The act includes a reclassification of femicide as a first-degree crime. It would criminalize coercive control, increase penalties for sexual assault, ensure better protection for sexual deepfakes and outline new guidelines on stays of proceedings under Jordan's principle. It would provide some new measures to assist victims. However, the bill fails on mandatory minimum penalties. Even worse, it misses a key opportunity to tell the Supreme Court that it cannot strike down a mandatory minimum penalty when it comes to possession and distribution of child pornography.

I will take some time today to talk about Bill C-16, the good, the bad and the ugly. I want to start by talking about child protection. Protecting our nation's children should be the highest order for any judicial or law enforcement officer. With the evolution of technology, and criminal elements getting more vicious and more sophisticated, the law must catch up.

Bill C-16 would build on a Harper-era child protection law called the Mandatory Reporting Act. It would redefine “Internet service” to clarify that the Mandatory Reporting Act applies to all types of Internet services, including online platforms, social media and other apps, and that providers with a connection to Canada must report child sexual abuse and exploitation material to law enforcement. This is important for operators that operate outside of Canada. The bill would also require Internet service providers to include transmission data when reporting material that manifestly includes child sexual abuse in the material itself to law enforcement. That is all good.

The bill would also centralize mandatory notification to a designated law enforcement body. This is fairly important. I hope we are not going to create another bureaucracy here. We should probably do that within the RCMP. It would be good to centralize all reporting of such criminal behaviour to one body.

The bill would also extend the preservation period of computer data related to child sexual abuse from 21 days to one year. That is very important. I spoke to an RCMP officer recently, and that officer told me about the chronic delays at the RCMP. While well intentioned, sometimes the RCMP does not have the resources to move on a matter quickly. The bill would require interim providers to maintain child sexual abuse materials for at least a year to allow law enforcement to catch up.

Separately, Bill C-16 would create a new offence of inviting a child to expose his or her sexual organs for a sexual purpose. I

would be surprised if that type of criminal behaviour is not already criminal. It probably is, but it does not hurt to clarify that. The bill also proposes to create a new offence of recruiting a child to be a party to a crime. All of that is good; the bill would close a number of loopholes. I welcome the child protection elements of this bill.

There is another component that would apply to children and adults but would likely help a lot of children. The bill would amend the Criminal Code to address non-consensual distribution of deepfake images. It would expand on the offence of prohibiting non-consensual distribution of intimate images to capture sexually explicit fakes. Now, the bill draws directly from a Conservative private member's bill, that of the Conservative immigration critic, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, Bill C-216.

The government is welcome to steal Conservative ideas. Technology moves fast, and the law must keep up. Between AI and virtual reality, it is hard to tell what is real or not, sometimes. This technology is out there already. It is open source, which means that anyone can basically get it off the web and access it. There is no place where this is more dangerous than in schools. Unfortunately, sometimes schoolchildren bully each other by sharing these fake images. By the time a school catches up, those images are already out there and are being picked up and distributed by predators.

I welcome this provision of Bill C-16. It is long overdue. Again, I congratulate my colleague the member for Calgary Nose Hill on the incorporation of her proposal in Bill C-16.

• (1730)

I will move on to talk about the much-needed protection of women.

The bill proposes to define femicide in criminal law. Murders that meet this description would automatically qualify as first-degree murder. Those found guilty would get harsher sentences: jail with no possibility of parole for at least 25 years, rather than the 10 years for second-degree murder. This is not a new concept in our criminal law. We already prescribe first-degree murder for a number of criteria. For instance, the murder of a peace officer or a correctional officer would attract a first-degree murder charge, or a murder during a carjacking or hostage taking, murders committed during sexual assault, contract killing, killing during terrorist activity and more.

*Government Orders*

The definition of femicide would cover murder committed against an intimate partner. Over the last seven years, there were over 1,300 female deaths in Canada by intimate partners. The need to act is apparent, but this proposal is not new either. I am proud of the Conservative member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, our public safety critic, since Bill C-16 essentially draws on Bailey's law, his Bill C-225, which unanimously passed second reading just last month. Compliments to the government for picking up another Conservative bill. This legislative change would have a significant impact on how the justice system treats violence against women. It would alter how cases are prosecuted and increase accountability for offenders. Again, I congratulate another friend, this time the shadow minister for public safety, and I thank the Attorney General for copying the Conservatives yet again.

On victims' rights, the bill is also good. I am often surprised by how little standing victims have in law in Canada. They have almost no control over the criminal process. Victims are not even referred to as “victims” or the “alleged victims” during a criminal process. They are referred to as the “complaining witness”. I watched this at legal aid in law school. The Crowns are too busy, and the victims often do not understand the law or the challenges. However, Bill C-16 would take a few steps in the right direction. It would entitle victims of violent offences to testimonial aids. It would require that victims in court proceedings be treated with respect and compassion. By the way, it is important to note that this provision should not cut into the presumption of innocence, which probably needs a little bit of thinking, because a defence lawyer must be able to confront an alleged victim and test their credibility. Nonetheless, every witness, and especially the complaining witness, must be treated with compassion and respect.

The bill would require authorities to share information with victims about the status and outcomes of an investigation. It is not unusual for a victim not to know what transpired with the charges brought against a person who offended against them. It would require that the time and location of relevant court proceedings be shared, giving victims an option to request and receive information with respect to a release of an offender, and it would require authorities to tell victims about their rights. This is also good. I thank the government for looking to highlight the fact that victims require greater participation in the justice process.

I will now move to some of the more challenging elements of the bill.

I know criminal defence attorneys who have made a career out of dismissal for delay by virtue of Jordan's principle. In the Jordan decision, the Supreme Court interpreted the speedy trial provisions of the charter and required that charges be suspended, stayed, if an accused had to wait for an unreasonable amount of time to be brought to justice, to face trial. The Supreme Court, in its wisdom, decided that for a summary offence in the lower court, the provincial court, such time would be 18 months, and in the Superior Court for hybrid or indictable offences, when the Crown proceeds by way of an indictment, such delay cannot exceed 30 months, or the charges would be stayed.

• (1735)

Bill C-16 includes measures to respond to a very high number of dismissals for delay. For example, it would direct courts to consider specific factors relating to the case's complexity. There are cases that are incredibly complex. I have witnessed a lot of white-collar cases that take a significant amount of time to investigate and prosecute. The bill may exclude certain time periods from the calculations that go into the total delay. It would require courts to consider alternative remedies before granting a stay of proceedings.

It is important to note that Jordan's principle already sets out certain criteria under which delays by the court proceedings are justifiable, so the bill would basically expand on these criteria. In 2024, 30% of sexual assault cases across Canada breached Jordan's principle. In Ontario, that number is 39%, almost 40% in the province I come from. Four out of 10 sexual assault cases are thrown out or could be thrown out due to delay. Notably, Bill C-16 proposes procedural streamlining for sexual offence trials.

This is no reason to absolve provincial governments from providing adequate resources in the courts. Too often, we read that there is not enough court staff or no courtrooms are available in the province of Ontario. Nor is it a reason to excuse the federal government from its failure to appoint enough judges. However, the practical reality is that provinces are breaching Jordan's principle far too often. That is not to say that the right to a speedy trial should be done away with, as it is a charter right, but the federal government is correct in stepping in to provide the system with some relief. That is not an unreasonable proposition. One thing I have often found odd is that delays incurred because of the accused or the defence team count in the total amount of delay. It never made sense. There is room for improvement of Jordan's principle, and I welcome further discussion about this at committee.

I think that is it for the good. Now let us move on to the bad: in the mandatory minimum sentences, the so-called safety valve that the government is introducing. Under the Criminal Code, mandatory minimum penalties, MMPs, apply to a range of serious offences. These mandatory minimums are designed to set the sentencing floor, a minimum term of imprisonment that Parliament deemed necessary for denunciation, deterrence and public safety in specific categories of crimes. In recent years, though, the courts have been striking down mandatory minimums under section 12 of the charter as cruel and unusual punishment more and more. That, of course, includes the Supreme Court up the street.

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The Liberals frame Bill C-16 as a response to this line of jurisprudence. They are pointing to a recent decision by the Supreme Court, in *Quebec v. Senneville*. That is a decision from earlier in this session, just last fall, where the Supreme Court struck down a mandatory minimum sentence for possession and distribution of child pornography. What else do the Liberals do? They add a sweeping change by creating a safety valve. The valve would allow courts to impose sentences below the mandatory minimum when applying the minimum would amount to a cruel and unusual punishment. Effectively, this would convert a mandatory minimum from a binding floor to a discretion and allow a judge to statutorily disregard the mandatory minimum. In practice, it means that mandatory minimums would no longer be mandatory. While jail would still be required, the duration of imprisonment would be left to a judge's discretion.

• (1740)

In practice, that means that if a judge feels that the minimum sentence imposed by Parliament is too extreme, they can just disregard the minimum. This is outlandish. This would erode mandatory minimum sentences. It would result in lighter sentences for serious repeat offenders. The Liberals are doing the exact opposite of what Canadians have asked them to do, which is to take a bite out of crime, especially with violent repeat offenders.

Previously, a constitutional argument was required; a person could not just march in. They previously had to mount an argument that the sentence was cruel and unusual, but now it would be an automatic argument every time. This is not a political argument. This is a basic legal argument. It is common sense. The safety valve is a major concession to judicial activism. It would undermine the role of this Parliament.

This body, this Parliament, sets sentencing policy, and what is worse is that because of the wearing down and the ability to disregard a mandatory minimum sentence, the principle of deterrence, which is one of the key principles of sentencing, is lost. That is very misguided.

Now let us go from the bad to the ugly. Bill C-16 refuses to do what the Conservatives implored the Liberals to do, and that is in response to the *Senneville* decision and to the Supreme Court's striking down the mandatory minimum sentence for distribution and possession of child pornography. The Conservatives implored the Liberals to invoke the notwithstanding clause to protect the minimum sentences for the possession of child pornography.

This is not about the kids who were already abused, raped or exploited in these pictures or videos. This is about more kids in the future who will be raped because the courts failed to punish these perverts and deter future perverts. We have to go hard here so we can kill this industry.

What was the point of the notwithstanding clause? It was to prevent absurdity. When he was attorney general, Jean Chrétien used the clause to seal the deal on the charter, and he specifically used an example of absurdity that the Supreme Court could come up with. It was a hypothetical that Chrétien came up with that the Supreme Court would find possession of child pornography protected by the freedom of expression. I think people in this room, even the Liberals, would agree that such a finding would be absurd.

That is not the scenario we had here in *Senneville*, but it was close. He pleaded guilty to the possession of 300 images, mostly of girls between the ages of three and six being sexually exploited. Naud pleaded guilty to possessing 531 images and 274 videos, and in many cases the kids were subjected to rape and sodomy. I am disgusted by this. Striking down the mandatory minimum one-year sentences for either of these two counts is exactly the kind of absurdity that Chrétien had in mind.

I say this as an Ontario lawyer. This is precisely and explicitly what section 33 was meant to do. These criminals are monsters, and I am proud of the Leader of the Opposition and my party for pushing this forward. We would invoke section 33 to prevent the absurdity that the Supreme Court arrived at, but the Attorney General is refusing our suggestion.

That is why I ask my Liberal colleagues to do their jobs to safeguard the line and protect children. Let us amend Bill C-16 at committee to invoke the notwithstanding clause, to restore mandatory minimum sentences for child pornography, and to lock up these monsters who, through their actions, contribute to the rape and sodomy of more children.

I am thankful for the opportunity to address this bill. Let us do away with the safety valve. Let us really stand up for children.

• (1745)

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the far right has spoken. At the end of the day, if there is an issue with any law, they have no problem bringing in the notwithstanding clause.

Does the member know that no prime minister has actually used the notwithstanding clause, and it has been there for decades? Now we have the current leader of the Conservative Party saying not to worry and that we can use it any time we want. They do not attach any value to the importance of the Canadian Constitution or the Charter of Rights.

If the Conservative Party is so confident of its position, allow the legislation to go to committee. It is a minority government. Get the support that the Conservatives so desire to do what they want, but at least let the legislation go to committee.

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, I specifically said that we should be fixing this bill at committee.

*Government Orders*

Here is something that I really do not appreciate about the members' remarks and generally his conduct in this chamber. I stood here for the last 20 minutes making a legal argument, not a political argument. There was no bravado or nonsense. I cited the precise scenario that was contemplated by the framers of the charter. I referred to days when I used to lecture part time on constitutional law and said that if there was a time that demanded the invocation of the notwithstanding clause, it would be this situation in Senneville in order to protect children who are being sodomized by pedophiles.

We have this manufactured anger from the member for Winnipeg North. It is not constructive to this debate, and I would ask him to behave himself.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that my colleague raised the Senneville case, which is very problematic. To my reading of that case, the problem is that the Supreme Court of Canada thinks that it can make up hypothetical, imaginary fact situations rather than just dealing with the fact situation that is in front of it.

Would it be an improvement to this bill if we were to prohibit that sort of rationalizing by the Supreme Court?

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, what I will say with respect to hypotheticals is that one can always come up with a hypothetical wherein the Supreme Court would deem a provision absurd. A first-year law student would be able to come up with a hypothetical that would make the situation absurd. What happens in these situations is that the police do not prosecute and the Crown attorneys do not proceed.

If we have absurdity, or not just no reasonable prospect of conviction but no need in process or conviction, it will not happen. How that hypothetical had anything to do with what was before the court at that moment, which was the possession of 274 videos of little girls being raped, and how it was relevant to the court's consideration is beyond me.

[*Translation*]

**Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I understand that my colleague thinks it is very important to pass these bills, which will help make our streets safer. I am referring to Bill C-9, Bill C-14 and Bill C-16.

I would like to ask him whether we can count on him and his colleagues to stop obstructing our work at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and allow us to adopt these three bills quickly, because we have a lot of work to do and a lot on our plates.

• (1750)

[*English*]

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, for weeks now, the Conservative members on the justice committee have been imploring the government to prioritize bail and sentencing, which Canadians so sorely deserve. Finally today, after this morning, the Prime Minister and the government House leader said that they wanted to move on with Bill C-14. We said, "Wait a minute. The Conservatives have been asking the government to move on with Bill C-14 for about a month and a half now." Finally today, we had consensus at the jus-

tice committee, and we are going to be prioritizing bail for the next couple of weeks.

I look forward to a constructive debate and to fixing what is now a somewhat deficient bill by the Liberals.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear from the Conservative member that they are going to prioritize bail and that we will finally get the bail reform legislation passed. It is something that should have passed last year, but I am glad the Conservatives are finally letting loose on that particular aspect.

Now we are on Bill C-16. Even the member who represents Kamloops in British Columbia says that a safety clause is a good thing. He recommended a safety clause in previous legislation. Was the member from Kamloops wrong to have recommended or suggested in any way that a safety clause is actually good? Has the Conservative Party changed its position because it is trying to position itself on this legislation?

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, it was a safety valve, not a safety clause. I would recommend that the member study his own legislation. Second of all, I would ask that he respect all members of the House and give them due respect by not taking their own words out of context.

Here what is clear about the safety valve: It would completely dilute the mandatory minimum sentencing regime, it would grant judges discretion and it would codify the ability of judges to ignore the mandatory minimum. This is not what Canadians are looking for. This is not what the Conservative Party stands for.

**Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that was a phenomenally informative speech. I learned a ton just listening to it, especially on the good parts of the bill about needed reforms within our justice system to ensure that victims have public safety.

Our shadow minister has made a recommendation to split the bill into two. Let us take the good parts that we have consensus on across all parties so the bill can get to the justice committee and can be studied properly and passed, and take out the contentious issues that are going to slow down the bill's passage and create issues. Does the hon. member agree that this is a good way to actually get public safety addressed for victims here in Canada?

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, I 100% agree with the member, and I agree with the Conservative justice critic.

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I hope that the members opposite were here for the majority of my remarks. There are quite a few good elements of the bill, many of them incorporated from previous proposals by various Conservative members on this side of the aisle. Canadians voted for a minority government. They voted for us to have good parliamentary process to arrive at the right balance. We already had good precedents for this. Conservatives took a principled opposition to Bill C-2, which infringed on constitutional freedoms and gave us a lot of cause for concern. The House leaders got together, and the Liberals agreed to separate the bill. The bill before us should probably follow the same course, which would help us get it through faster or let us fix the bill quickly.

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, just to be very clear on the issue, does the member believe that the second reading of the legislation should allow it to go to committee sooner as opposed to later so Canadians would be able to see it and the member would be able to present his arguments at the committee stage?

**Roman Baber:** Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of debate on the bill. It was introduced during the last week of the sitting of the current Parliament in 2025. There are some good elements to the bill, but Conservatives have serious reservations with respect to the safety valve and the effective elimination of mandatory minimum sentences. Right now, if someone wants to challenge a law as cruel and unusual, they bring a constitutional charter application. The bill would do that automatically and dilute the mandatory minimum sentence. Let us have a thoughtful discussion about what we want to do here.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

**Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for London West.

First, I would like to offer my best wishes for a happy new year to all my colleagues in the House and especially to all my constituents in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, whom I proudly represent, whether they are from Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand or Rosemère. I would like to wish everyone a safe and healthy 2026, and if possible, I would love for us to achieve world peace, so that everything going on around us could calm down somewhat.

I rise today as a member of Parliament, but also as chair of the Liberal women's caucus, to express my strong support for Bill C-16, the protecting victims act. This bill is ambitious. It is necessary. Above all, it is deeply rooted in the lived reality of too many women, too many children and too many survivors in this country.

For a long time, our criminal law has been designed to intervene after the fact, after the blows, after the attack, after the tragedy, sometimes even after death. Bill C-16 marks a fundamental change. It finally recognizes what survivors, advocates and experts have been telling us for years: Violence does not always begin with physical harm; it often begins with control, fear and isolation.

Coercive control is an insidious form of violence. It does not always leave visible marks. It sets in slowly. It is exercised through hurtful words, monitoring, humiliation, financial restriction, and implicit or explicit threats, yet it is one of the strongest predictors of serious violence and femicide.

Women told us that they did not recognize their own lives, that they had to ask permission to see their families. Can my colleagues imagine being forced to ask permission to see their families? These women told us that they no longer had access to their money, that they lived in constant fear without any clear criminal offence that could be invoked. Until now, the Criminal Code has not had the tools to address this reality. Bill C-16 corrects that.

By creating a specific offence relating to coercive or controlling conduct in the context of an intimate relationship, our government is sending a clear message: This type of violence is real, it is serious and it deserves a serious criminal response. Let me be clear. This offence is carefully worded. It requires a pattern of behaviour and clear intent, and it takes into account the power imbalance within the relationship. It is aimed at protecting victims, not criminalizing them. It is a preventive measure, an early intervention measure, a measure that can save lives.

Bill C-16 also recognizes a painful reality. Too often, when the violence culminates in death, the justice system fails to name what actually happened. When a homicide is committed in a context of coercive control, sexual violence, exploitation or hate, it is not an isolated incident. It is the culmination of ongoing violence.

Bill C-16 now recognizes these homicides as the most serious crimes. It elevates these murders to first-degree murder. It also requires the courts to consider imposing a life sentence if manslaughter is committed those circumstances. For victims' families, this legal recognition has been a long time coming.

The bill also modernizes our response to contemporary forms of violence. It includes intimate images generated by artificial intelligence. These sexual deepfakes are used to humiliate, control and extort victims. The problem disproportionately affects women and girls.

As chair of the Liberal women's caucus, I also want to point out that this bill is not limited to gender-based violence. It also strengthens protections for children against sexual exploitation, online grooming and sextortion. Predators use sophisticated technology these days. Our criminal law must keep pace. The bill restores mandatory minimum penalties for the most serious sexual offences committed against children, while providing a judicial safety valve to ensure charter compliance.

• (1800)

Bill C-16 clearly affirms the right of victims to be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. It improves access to information, expands access to testimonial aids, and recognizes the right of victims to participate fully in a process that concerns them.

Finally, this bill addresses another major problem: court delays. Too many serious cases are being dropped. Too many survivors look on while their cases collapse, not because the violence was not real, but because the system did not act fast enough. Bill C-16 requires the courts to consider alternatives before ordering a stay of proceedings. It simplifies certain rules of evidence and endeavours to restore public trust in our justice system.

This bill is the outcome of consultations, expertise and testimony. It is supported by women's rights organizations, child protection groups, police forces and several provinces. This bill represents a major step forward. Most importantly, it sends an essential message to victims: We believe them, we see them and we are taking action.

On behalf of the Liberal women's caucus, I support Bill C-16, and I encourage all parliamentarians to do the same.

[English]

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this bill addresses, in part, the shocking rise of intimate partner violence in Canada and it introduces the concept of femicide, which is the murder of a woman in the context of an intimate partner violent crime. Effectively, what that would do is classify any murder, whether it was manslaughter or second-degree murder, as first-degree murder if it were done in the context of intimate partner violence. I wonder if our colleague would have any comment on whether that would survive the inevitable charter challenge in the first case before the courts.

[Translation]

**Linda Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, this is a subject we have discussed many times. Intimate partner violence is one of our priorities. As I explained earlier, there are many coercive behaviours that tend to be seen before a femicide occurs. There are many measures that can be put in place regarding the intimate partner who is using psychological violence in the context of coercive control. Violence also includes preventing women from accessing their financial resources.

Say a woman is trapped in a domestic violence situation. She has children and cannot just leave home. She has no resources. If she is killed, it would be first-degree murder. Several steps have already been taken by that point. When the intimate partner takes that drastic step, the least we can do is ensure that he is charged with first-degree murder.

**Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lestiguj, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish my colleague a happy new year and a happy return to Parliament. Let us talk a bit about femicide, because the start of the year has been tragic. There have been several femicides, in Quebec at least. This bill will impose harsher sentences and make it possible to charge those who commit these heinous crimes with first-degree murder.

Can my colleague tell us what this wave of femicides means to her? How can we come up with solutions together to work proactively to reduce violence against women?

• (1805)

**Linda Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, since January 1, there have been four femicides in Quebec, and nine in total in Canada. It is unacceptable that we live in a country where women and girls experi-

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ence this violence. It has been proven and studied: There are several stages leading up to femicide. Ultimately, there is a kind of inner anger for which no solution has been found.

Since my colleague asked me the question, I would like to know whether the Bloc Québécois will support making coercive control a criminal offence. This will allow for much earlier intervention in cases of intimate partner violence.

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member has been a very powerful advocate through the women's caucus, and I applaud that.

In terms of femicide being elevated to first-degree murder, that is something relatively unique here in Canada. Could the member provide her thoughts on how Canada could play an important role, setting an example?

[Translation]

**Linda Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, and I am very pleased to be back here in the House with my colleagues.

Elevating femicide to first-degree murder also allows us to set an international example, particularly for democratic countries with justice systems similar to ours. I will say it again: it is unacceptable for this to be considered an ordinary murder. The victims' families must also be supported during the process. This is important if we want them to be able to find some semblance of peace in their lives.

I will continue if there is time.

[English]

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House again as the member of Parliament for London West. I want to wish all members a happy new year and wish my colleagues a very successful session as they return to represent those who sent them here.

It is a great honour and opportunity for me to speak to Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, and the government's ongoing efforts to protect children and ensure that child sexual exploitation is unequivocally denounced, deterred and prevented. Protecting children and standing firmly with victims are among the most fundamental responsibilities of Parliament. Canadians expect a justice system that sends a clear message that sexual exploitation will not be tolerated, that victims will be protected, and that those who cause serious harm will face serious consequences. Bill C-16, the protecting victims act, reflects the government's commitment to ensuring our criminal law is strong, principled and capable of meeting this responsibility.

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In particular, I will focus on Bill C-16's proposed reforms that address mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, in the Criminal Code.

To set the stage, when an offence is punishable by an MMP, it means that, absent an explicit statutory exception, a judge cannot impose a sentence that is lower than the prescribed minimum penalty, regardless of the circumstances. They can impose a longer sentence, but not a shorter one, so MMPs are the subject of a fierce debate. Some stakeholders support them for offering a clear denunciation for serious offences. Others, in other circumstances, have criticized them as potentially being an unfair limit on judicial discretion in sentencing, which can result in significantly harsher sentences for some offenders.

In particular, MMPs have raised the most concerns when they are attached to offences that apply to a wide range of conduct or circumstances. In such a scenario, a lengthy MMP can apply to conduct that involves relatively little risk to the public or lower moral blameworthiness. Because of this, MMPs are constitutionally vulnerable under section 12 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects against cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, because they can result in what are called "grossly disproportionate sentences". Gross disproportionality is a high threshold and has been described by the courts as being "merely excessive" or "disproportionate". It must outrage our society's sense of decency, such that Canadians would find it abhorrent and intolerable.

Over the years, MMPs have been declared unconstitutional by the courts across Canada on this basis. Most of the MMPs invalidated to date are for child sexual offences, including those struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Senneville* case or the *Bertrand Marchand* case. In both of these cases I just mentioned, the Supreme Court struck the MMPs down on the basis of a reasonably foreseeable scenario, meaning that the court considers whether the penalty is unconstitutional because of its effect on hypothetical offenders, not the actual offender before the court. In many cases, the court finds that proportionate sentences for the offender before them should be equal to or more than the MMP, but many MMPs are struck on the basis of a hypothetical offender whose conduct is captured by a broad offence but falls at the low end of risk regarding public moral fault. Because of this potential for a grossly disproportionate sentence, the court must find these penalties to be of no force or no effect.

Most recently, following the Senate bill decision, significant concerns have been raised by stakeholders across Canada and the public about the inability of Parliament to denounce and deter some of these more serious offences using MMPs. The government agrees, which is why we are taking decisive and immediate action by proposing reforms to Bill C-16. These changes are going to address this issue by amending the Criminal Code to restore the MMPs that have been found unconstitutional by the courts.

They would do this by enacting a provision that would give judges the discretion to order a sentence of imprisonment lower than the statutory MMP in very narrow situations. It is expected that, in most cases, the stated MMP would still be applied. However, if a court is sentencing an offender for whom the mandatory penalty would be a grossly disproportionate punishment, the court

would not need to impose the stated MMP, nor would it have to find the MMP unconstitutional.

It is important to emphasize that even though an individual may not be subject to a specific MMP, it is only in exceptional cases. In every case, the judge will still be required to impose a sentence of imprisonment.

• (1810)

Some people have raised questions about this, arguing that it does not reflect the guidance of the Supreme Court of Canada. I respectfully disagree. Requiring the imposition of a jail sentence in all cases would not only, in my view, create a risk of grossly disproportionate sentences, for the reasons I discussed earlier, including the fact that this standard is significant. Maintaining this aspect does something important; it excludes the option of a conditional sentence order for these very serious offences.

In my view, the proposed approach aims to strike an essential balance. We are aiming to ensure that courts impose serious consequences for serious offences, particularly those that harm our children and our communities, and to also ensure that judicial discretion is available for those exceptional cases that warrant lower sentences. I would also add that this approach is responsive both to requests from stakeholders and to suggestions that have been repeatedly made by the courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada, which suggested that such a judicial discretion clause could resolve most of the constitutional challenges associated with MMPs.

In making these comments, the Supreme Court made it clear that there would be only one requirement for such provisions: that it allow for a lower sentence where a specific MMP would violate the charter. This guidance is clearly reflected in the proposed amendments, and I am confident that they are a sound approach to maintaining appropriate MMPs while offering flexibility.

I would like to spend the remainder of my time elaborating on how the enactment of the judicial discretion clause would apply to existing MMPs. If Bill C-16 comes into force, by operation of the common law, all MMPs that had been found unconstitutional but that remain on the federal statute book would be considered restored. This would include recently invalidated MMPs for the possession of child sexual abuse and exploitation material, among many others. In addition, to ensure that this point is clearly understood by the legal community and the public, clause 87 of the bill provides that, for greater certainty, following the enactment of the judicial discretion clause, the operation of the existing minimum punishments would also be affirmed.

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In practice, as a result of the proposed amendments, the courts would once again be required to impose MMPs for all offences where that penalty has not been repealed from the law, except in the rarest of cases where the MMP would result in cruel and unusual punishment for the offender before the court. This would enable Parliament to ensure that serious offences resulting in significant harm to victims and communities continue to attract severe sentences, while allowing courts to avoid imposing disproportionate punishments in exceptional cases.

I firmly believe that all members of the House can agree that this approach represents a sound compromise to ensure that a vast majority of MMPs remain available and actionable by the courts. In my view, this approach represents a positive evolution of the law that ensures that our legal frameworks remain effective and responsive to the concerns of the day.

In closing, I would like to highlight that the approach of Bill C-16 would complement the sentencing reforms proposed by our government in Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act. Taken together, Bill C-14 and Bill C-16 reflect a clear and deliberate choice by the government to strengthen sentencing laws, protecting children and ensuring that the people who commit serious sexual offences face real, meaningful consequences.

• (1815)

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talked quite a bit about mandatory minimums and addressing the concern that our courts have had, particularly the Supreme Court of Canada, in declaring mandatory minimum penalties to be unconstitutional, contrary to section 12 of the charter. The problem we are facing is that courts have recently come out with the concept of hypothetical fact scenarios. Rather than dealing with the facts in front of them, they conjure up a hypothetical fact scenario and judge the constitutionality of the legislation against that hypothetical fact scenario.

If Bill C-16 is an improvement, should it prohibit judges from being able to use hypothetical fact scenarios?

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Mr. Speaker, I will comment on the fact that whether they are hypothetical or not, we should deal with them. This is what Bill C-16 is offering, which is that we deal with the issue at hand. It is a solution, and it is what I think the courts and Canadians would want us to do.

I would put a question back to the member opposite: What would he propose that we do better in this situation?

**Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no question that crime and violence are changing all the time with the introduction of technology. We know that this bill embeds pieces around deepfakes and different online protections.

Has the member had conversations with people in her community about any of the provisions within this bill, and what were those conversations like?

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Mr. Speaker, this is something that a lot of people are talking about, especially parents. I am a mother. I have a teenage son who is navigating online. Many people want to talk about how this affects younger women and the conversations and education that are needed when we have our kids online.

One of the questions the member asked was about what our stakeholders were saying. As I mentioned earlier, there is a bit of a divide. We can never have a bill where all parties agree, but the life of this bill is that we want to make sure we are dealing with the important issues that harm our communities and harm our children and, as was mentioned, deepfakes. We saw recently on X that it is unable to address the issues that are affecting young women on the platform. This is an important issue that we continue to have in our communities.

Maybe the House can pass Bill C-16 and Bill C-14 quickly, things that Canadians sent us here to do.

• (1820)

**Tako Van Popta:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for asking me a question, and I am going to answer it now.

What would I do? We are talking about mandatory minimum sentences and a judge's inclination to conjure up hypothetical fact situations. I was reading section 63 of the proposed act, which would introduce proposed section 718.4 to the Criminal Code. It says that courts may steer around a minimum sentence if the minimum punishment would "amount to cruel and unusual punishment for that offender."

I was optimistic and thinking that "for that offender" would rule out hypotheticals. Is that what that section means, just for clarification?

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know the specific member's riding name, but the member does have a colleague who agrees with the scenario where mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, would be unconstitutional. That member said, "Conservatives have faced push-back because we want mandatory minimums for an offence for which the victim is serving a psychological life sentence. People will say that it failed in the Harper era. It failed in the Harper era because all we needed was a safety valve to say 'except in exceptional circumstances'. That is what one of the member's colleagues said. They agreed with this bill, and I hope the member also gets on board.

**Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I too join my voice to the debate around Bill C-16. This bill comes in the wake of a decade of the Liberal soft-on-crime agenda. Now the Liberals seem to want to be the solution to the problems they have caused.

Over the last decade, we have seen crime across the country. If violent crime in Canada were to be plotted on a graph, we would see that it was steadily going up until about 2010. Then it declined until about 2014, when it started to go up again. It is interesting to lay over that the elections and the election results of that time.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

That is entirely what this comes down to, which is the enforcement of the law and the general sentiment the Liberals project when it comes to law enforcement. A number of years back we heard of some tacit support from the Liberal Party for the movement to defund the police. We have seen legalized drugs across the country. We have seen exemptions to the Criminal Code in certain jurisdictions. Over the last decade, we have watched crime climb clear across the country.

I remember when I came to Ottawa back in 2007. The people of Ottawa were very proud of how clean their city was. That is no longer the case. Crime and chaos have come to Ottawa. Drug use is a big problem, particularly in the downtown core. As well, murders are up 45% this year. This is right here in Ottawa, our capital city. That speaks to the challenges of our country.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Niagara South, although I am certain that will be on another day.

In my neck of the woods, auto theft has been a major challenge for a long time. I am pleased the Liberal government seems to have taken action on that, but that was only after Toronto and Montreal started to complain about it aggressively.

Now, the other thing I wanted to talk about with this bill is how we got here. We got here after a decade of Liberals being soft on crime. We also got here because of a specific Supreme Court decision. My colleague from Langley Township—Fraser Heights touched on this just before I spoke, and this is the kind of thing that really galls me.

The court did not deal with the case that was in front of them. It dealt with a hypothetical situation, and I highly doubt that particular hypothetical situation would ever make it to court. The police would never lay charges in that case. Even if the police did lay charges, the prosecutor would say there was not really a case. Even if the prosecutor said that they probably did have a case, his supervisor would say that it was crazy.

The hypothetical case the Supreme Court judged a mandatory minimum sentence to be too egregious for was not the case that was in front of the court. It was a totally made-up case. The individuals in that case do not even exist. Here we are, with the Supreme Court striking down the law based on a severely hypothetical case.

It comes down to the fact that these courts do not like mandatory minimum sentences, and these are political decisions. Whether we like them or not is a political decision. The court wants to run around and say that it does not get involved in politics and that the government cannot interfere with the court's decisions. The courts are making a political decision by saying that they do not like mandatory minimum sentences, after mandatory minimum sentences have been duly debated and passed in this place. It should not be the judges' opinions on these things that matter. That goes to the hypothetical situation that it struck down.

We could have gotten around this mandatory minimum sentence challenge had the government just invoked the notwithstanding clause. The Liberals say that is an undermining of the Constitution. They say that all the time, that using the notwithstanding clause undermines the Constitution.

The reality is that the notwithstanding clause is in the Constitution. It is the Constitution. There is no undermining of the Constitution by using the notwithstanding clause. The Constitution would never have become the Constitution had the notwithstanding clause been put into it.

● (1825)

The other thing is that the court can get it wrong sometimes, and that this place gets to then be the arbiter of whether the court got it wrong. That is why the notwithstanding clause exists, and particularly in this case, I think the court got it wrong in terms of whether mandatory minimums for heinous crimes, such as they are, should stand. They got it wrong in the fact that they used a hypothetical situation to strike down the mandatory minimum sentence. If they were prepared to strike down the mandatory minimum sentence, they should have done it on the merits of the case that was before them and on the merits of the individuals who were standing there before them to be tried.

However, they did not do that. They knew that the public would never stand for the striking down of that mandatory minimum sentence given the heinous crimes of these individuals, so they came up with another hypothetical situation, and that is not appropriate. That is beyond the scope of our entire system.

A constituent came by the other day, and he pointed out to me an interesting thing. I think I will leave it here today. He said that it feels to him like the system no longer defends the interests of the citizen. He said that when his stuff goes missing, there is a half-hearted attempt to find it and charge somebody, but on the flip side, the system is very keen to defend itself and to defend the interests of the system.

We see this over and over again. When the system is under threat, suddenly the Liberals spring into action and say to not use the notwithstanding clause, to arrest that protester or to go after an organized group of folks. When the interests of the system are being threatened, suddenly there is action taking place, but when a private individual citizen's stuff goes missing, then the system seems unable to find the stolen stuff, to bring the perpetrator to justice, to go after a trespasser, or any of these kinds of things. The system seems quite lethargic, but when it comes to the interest of defending the system, suddenly the system seems to be able to spring into action.

I thought that was a profound insight. When we go forward to the next bill that we deal with, I am going to see if it is a defence of the system or a defence of the interests of the citizen that we are debating here today. I think we are debating the defence of the system.

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## **ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1830)

[English]

## EMPLOYMENT

**Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be back in the House. I missed all my colleagues. I trust that feeling is mutual. It is good to be back here to address the business of the nation.

I want to offer my condolences to the family of Kirsty Duncan, with whom many of us served.

I also want to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with the brave people of Iran, who have endured unspeakable violence and are struggling for their freedom and for respect for their fundamental human rights. As others have said, I believe the lion and the sun will rise again, and we must do all we can to support the brave people of Iran.

Tonight I am following up on a question that I asked previously about youth unemployment. Meanwhile there are new figures out on unemployment in this country, and we see the continuance of the youth unemployment crisis. The latest numbers show a 0.3% increase in the unemployment rate and a 0.5% increase in youth unemployment, from 12.8 % to 13.3%. Those are very high recession levels of youth unemployment, with 73,000 more unemployed, an increase in the number of unemployment of 73,000 people in that month. Meanwhile, while there are employment struggles in the private sector, we have the biggest public sector ever.

Those numbers were reflected in the conversations I have been having with young people and people of all ages across the country. In January I visited five different university campuses; I was at U of A, two universities in the Toronto area and two in Nova Scotia. The question I have been asking students is whether they are better off or worse off than their parents' generation. I will report back to members of the House, and I think it is important to recognize this, that young people overwhelmingly say they are worse off than their parents' generation.

Key reasons for that are the employment situation and the housing crisis. The struggle for homes and for jobs is top of mind for today's young people, who are concerned that they do not and will not have the same standard of living as their parents, in particular because of the struggle to afford a home and find a job. Compounding that are general affordability concerns, especially the high cost of food. That is what young people are dealing with in this country.

I think that to solve this problem we have to look squarely on the reality that the problem exists, to magnify the voices of young people who are concerned, and to talk about concrete solutions. That is why, in the fall, the Conservatives announced the Conservative youth jobs plan. We took a very constructive approach.

Sadly, the Liberals have moved in the opposite direction in many respects. For instance, we have proposed fixes to training that would support and recognize instances where young people are seeking skills that would make them job-ready. In fact the government is going in the opposite direction by its proposal to pull grant funding from students who are studying at career colleges. We are concerned about the present situation and about the direction of the

government that is actually making things worse for young people looking for jobs, homes and hope.

In this new year, is the government prepared to change direction and take seriously the constructive proposals the Conservatives have put forward?

**Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Jobs and Families, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to the family of my dear colleague, Kirsty Duncan, who was a great source of inspiration and comfort for me when my mom passed away five short months after my first election in 2019.

Young people across the country are asking the same question: How do we make sure opportunity keeps pace with a changing economy? That is why supporting youth employment is not abstract for our government; it is a priority we are acting on with real investments and real results.

Through budget 2025, we are creating more pathways into good jobs and making education more affordable. We announced \$307.9 million over two years, starting in 2026-27, for the youth employment skills strategy, supporting employment, training and wraparound services for roughly 20,000 youth facing barriers each year. We also committed \$26.1 million to six national projects under the YESS strategic collaboration stream. These projects are focused on solving real challenges young people face, bringing together youth, service providers, employers and researchers to develop solutions that can scale. That includes better tools for employers to support youth with disabilities, and stronger data to guide evidence-based decisions.

The labour market is changing quickly, with new technologies, new industries and new skills. Our approach reflects that reality. That is why we continue to invest in students and apprentices as they prepare for the workforce. For the 2025-26 academic year, we extended the temporary increases to Canada student grants and loans. That includes the 40% increase for full-time and part-time students, students with disabilities and students with dependents, as well as the higher weekly student loan limit of \$300. We have also expanded Canada student loan forgiveness for health care and social service professionals working in rural and remote communities, which is now covering 10 additional occupations from early childhood educators and social workers to personal support workers and physiotherapists. These measures recognize the pressures students are facing today, and they help ensure that cost is not a barrier to building a future.

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We are also delivering results through programs that directly connect young people to work. A recent evaluation of the youth employment and skills strategy program found that 76% of participants were employed or back in school after completing the program. For summer 2025, Canada summer jobs created up to 76,000 opportunities. Budget 2025 will increase that to around 100,000 summer jobs in 2026. Through the student work placement program, we expect to support roughly 55,000 placements in 2026. Taken together, these programs will create more than 175,000 job opportunities for young Canadians in 2026-27 alone.

This is how we make sure young people are not left behind: by investing in their skills, lowering the cost of education and opening doors to real opportunity.

• (1835)

**Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Speaker, there are many different parts of that response that I could pick up on, but let us talk about what is in the budget, very concretely.

Page 217 of the budget states:

Budget 2025 announces the government's intention to propose legislative and regulatory amendments to address integrity issues related to private educational institutions by generally limiting access to the Canada Student Grant for Full-time Students to students attending public educational institutions and not-for-profit private institutions within Canada.

In effect, that excludes career colleges.

As the economy changes in different ways, career colleges are often very nimble, developing new programs to meet new challenges and providing students with very practical vocational skills. The government's approach is to say that anyone who studies anything at a university can have access to these grants, yet, for students in those kinds of institutions who study for specific career-oriented skills that likely are skills that they can train for only in the career college institutions, the government is saying "no dice". Why is the government attacking these kinds of institutions and students?

**Annie Koutrakis:** Mr. Speaker, young people want to know that there is a real future waiting for them, whether the future is in a classroom, a workplace or the skilled trades. That is why our government is acting, not with talk but with concrete support.

Budget 2025 proposes \$75 million to expand the union training and innovation program, strengthening union-based apprenticeship training in Red Seal trades and opening more doors for young Canadians. This builds on nearly \$1 billion we already invest every year to make trades training more affordable through loans, tax credits and employment insurance supports. Through the Canadian apprenticeship strategy, apprentices get the help they need to complete training and earn certification. While they are in technical training, employment insurance provides income support, and through the Canada apprentice loan, apprentices can access up to \$20,000 in interest-free loans.

This is what action looks like: backing young people with real support on every path to work, including the skilled trades.

• (1840)

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week is the anniversary of the final report of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference. I want to quote two conclusions from that report. First, the report states, "the People's Republic of China (PRC) is the most active perpetrator of foreign interference targeting Canada's democratic institutions. The PRC views Canada as a high-priority target." The report goes on to say, "The PRC targets members of Chinese Canadian diaspora communities for the purposes of repression, influence and forced return of targeted individuals to the PRC."

In its own country, China's repression of its own people is well documented, and, until recently, the Prime Minister agreed. During the election, when asked the question about the greatest security threat to Canada, the Prime Minister responded, "I think the biggest security threat to Canada is China". However, just nine months later, the Prime Minister says he is forging a "new strategic partnership" with our greatest security threat.

Trade with China is necessary. A positive diplomatic relationship with China is necessary. Forging a "new strategic partnership" with China, however, is a choice. Declaring that we are setting ourselves up for a Chinese-led new world order is a choice. Doing these things with great fanfare and media attention is a choice, and choices made by governments have consequences. Attempting to trade American unpredictability for Chinese dependence is not the answer.

When Lithuania opened an office in Taiwan, China blocked the majority of their imports within months. When Norway awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to a Chinese dissident, relations froze for years. When Korea accepted THAAD missile deployment, it endured state-sanctioned tourism embargoes, costing its economy billions. Deals with China have consequences. The government owes Canadians an explanation for why it has reversed course and has moved from a position of declaring China our greatest security threat to a position of strategic partnership and ever-growing alignment.

Can the parliamentary secretary provide Canadians that explanation?

**Hon. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs and One Canadian Economy (Canada-U.S. Trade), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to join my colleagues in extending my condolences to the family of the Hon. Kirsty Duncan. She was a brilliant and passionate member of the chamber, and she will very much be missed.

I am thankful for the opportunity to address the House on a matter of critical importance to Canada's economy.

Canada's prosperity has always been tied to strong, reliable trade relationships, and none, I would add, is more important than the one we share with the United States. In 2024 the United States remained Canada's top merchandise trading partner, receiving \$595.9 billion of Canada's merchandise exports. Over 75% of Canadian exports were destined for the United States in 2024. Every day, over 3.4 billion dollars' worth of goods and services cross our shared border, supporting jobs and driving innovation on both sides of the border.

For decades this fundamental trade relationship has been anchored in rules, predictability and mutual benefit. Together we have fostered a North American economy that is competitive, resilient and innovative. However, as we know, the United States is fundamentally reshaping all its trade relationships, causing major disruption and upheaval for its trading partners, including Canada. The U.S. administration's imposition of tariffs of up to 50% on Canadian steel, aluminum and other critical exports is not just economically harmful; the tariffs also disrupt supply chains, inflate costs and erode the trust that has sustained our partnership for generations.

Our industries, including the steel, aluminum, forestry and automotive sectors, are the backbone of our Canadian communities. The steel sector alone contributes over \$4 billion to our GDP and sustains more than 23,000 jobs, with tens of thousands more in related sectors. These industries are critical for building homes, infrastructure and the clean energy future Canadians expect.

That is why, on November 26, Canada's new government moved quickly to protect and strengthen the sectors most affected by the U.S. tariffs, introducing new measures to help workers gain new skills, support businesses as they modernize and diversify, and boost domestic demand for Canadian goods. However, we recognize that our priority and the government's focus must be to find a long-term solution to the harmful tariffs with the U.S. administration.

Where do these negotiations stand? Before President Trump abruptly paused discussions last month, our teams were making progress, exploring pathways toward a sectoral deal that could restore stability in our bilateral trade. Canada remains ready and open to re-engage. We are also preparing for the CUSMA review scheduled to begin this year.

Our message to the United States is clear: Canada will always defend its interests, but we will do so as a constructive partner committed to stability, prosperity and growth.

• (1845)

**Jacob Mantle:** Mr. Speaker, I do not say this often, but unfortunately this is the problem when parliamentary secretaries come and simply read prepared remarks. Nothing in the response addressed my question about why the government has decided to move from considering China as a geopolitical adversary and our greatest threat to now forging a new strategic partnership.

I will generously interpret the member's response as saying that Canada had some trouble with its best friend, the United States, and therefore the response to that is we are going to jump in bed with a

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

geopolitical adversary, which is China. Let me reiterate that trading American unpredictability for Chinese dependence is not the answer.

The parliamentary secretary suggested he is looking for a long-term solution. Is his long-term solution partnerships over time and greater alignment with China?

**Hon. Ali Ehsassi:** Mr. Speaker, what I have been trying to emphasize to the member is that we are forging stronger ties with a range of trading partners, and we are building a stronger domestic economy, one economy that works for all Canadians.

As I listen to the member, I would say the opposition can criticize all it likes, but Canadians expect action, not slogans.

Our government is standing up for workers, defending key industries and doing the hard work of diplomacy, whether it comes to the United States or to other countries. We are working to negotiate with all these countries. We are protecting jobs, stabilizing sectors under attack and keeping the door open to a negotiated solution with the U.S. while we diversify our relationship with other countries.

Walking away or posturing might make for good politics, but I would say that Canadians—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** Order, please.

The hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

**Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said something at Davos that sounded like pure common sense. He said, "A country that cannot feed itself, fuel itself or defend itself has few options." Most Canadians heard that and thought, "Well, of course," and yet the Prime Minister does the exact opposite here at home. He talks about fuelling ourselves, and then his government blocks energy projects. He talks about prosperity, and then investment gets buried under years of red tape. He talks about independence, and then Canada becomes more dependent, not less. Canadians are left scratching their heads because the words make sense but the actions do not.

When a government keeps saying the right things while doing the opposite, people stop listening to speeches and start paying attention to their bills, their jobs and their future. That is the gap Canadians are feeling right now, between what is said abroad and what is actually happening at home.

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At Davos, the Prime Minister told the world that the rules-based order is ruptured. He warned countries to stop living within a lie and to be honest about the gap between rhetoric and reality.

However, here is the reality that Canadians are living with. The rules-based order has not been thrown out the window, especially when it comes to our most important trading relationship. Despite tough rhetoric coming out of Washington, the vast majority of Canadian goods are still flowing into the U.S. under CUSMA, with minimal tariffs and established rules still in place. There are thousands of businesses that rely on CUSMA. They cannot afford anything that puts that relationship at risk. The system is under strain, but it is still functioning. A strong negotiator would have brought stability, not uncertainty, for Canadian businesses.

At Davos, the Prime Minister also warned against nostalgia. He said we should not hanker after things that no longer are. He told the world that the old order is finished and is not coming back, yet the moment he returned home and reality set in, his tune changed. Faced with pressure from the U.S., our largest trading partner, he suddenly began talking about a reset, about rebuilding the relationship and returning to something closer to what we had before.

Members can take note of the irony here. Abroad, the Prime Minister tells global leaders that nostalgia is foolish. At home, he asks Canadians to believe he can restore the very relationship he said no longer exists. This is where Canadians bring the conversation back to the basics. If we do not have a pipeline to the Pacific, then we do not really have access to the world. We have one main customer, the U.S., and that means we do not have leverage when things get tense; we have dependence.

We can talk all we like about diversification and resilience, but until Canadian oil can reach global buyers through a reliable Pacific corridor, those words do not change our reality. This is not about who has the power to act. The federal government has the authority to move projects like this forward. It does not require another announcement or another overseas speech. It requires decisions, permits and a clear timeline.

Instead, what we keep seeing are press conferences, consultations and promises that remain stubbornly in the future. The result is that Canadians stay stuck, rich in resources and short on results. Canada has everything it needs: the resources, the workers and the global demand. What is missing is not vision but the willingness to act. Until the government is prepared to approve projects and turn speeches into action, Canadians will keep living with a gap between what is said abroad and what is done at home.

If the Prime Minister truly believes what he said at Davos, when will he remove the laws that make pipelines to tidewater impossible?

• (1850)

**Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to follow through on the general thread of my colleague's questions because it provides a pretty good framework to go through them bit by bit.

The Prime Minister did, in fact, talk about feed, fuel and defend, things that Canada does very well. We are an energy superpower.

Our oil and gas production from 2015 to 2024 went up 34% when, across the globe, it only went up 6%. We grow more food than most nations could even dream of. We are increasing our NATO spending to 2%, moving on to 5% in the years to come.

When we talk about dependence, yes, it is true that Canada does have a challenge with dependence. Currently, 71% of our exports go to the United States of America. The next closest G7 country is Japan at 19%. When she talked about the issues at home that Canadians talk about, such as affordability, this is also true, which is why I hope members opposite will support us in passing very promptly the groceries and essentials benefit that was announced by the Prime Minister today.

There is a rupture, and that rupture caused goods under CUSMA at first to not even be eligible to move forward. When President Trump decided that those would be allowed to go forward, it provided us a great deal of benefit as a country. In fact, Canada has the lowest effective tariff rate in the world at about 8%, the next closest being Mexico. We understand now that when we talk about negotiations with Donald Trump and the United States, we also have to measure that sometimes those deals can change as they go forward, as we saw with Europe being threatened with tariffs over Greenland recently. Talking about outcomes, the outcome is that we currently have the best deal, and we will sustain the best deal as we do the hard work to reset and diversify.

That brings us to the pipeline. The pipeline we currently have, Trans Mountain and the Trans Mountain expansion, has allowed Canada to diversify some away from the United States. Currently, 90% of our oil goes to the United States. The 10% that does not is because of the Trans Mountain pipeline that a previous Liberal government managed to get over the line. We have to do more, and that is why we have an MOU with Alberta, which is getting us another pipeline to the west coast.

However, I will say this. Bulldozing will not work. We get things done in this country by working together. The Government of Alberta understands that. The Government of Alberta is working toward a submission in June for a pipeline project. There is no pipeline project right now for the government to approve. Just as the Prime Minister said that nostalgia is not a strategy, neither is wishful thinking.

We will do the hard work as the government, and we will get things built.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1855)

**Tamara Jansen:** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister sold himself as a master negotiator. People elected him to get a deal with the U.S., and now he is telling everyone that our old relationship with it is finished.

I have spoken to local business owners, manufacturers, exporters and family-run companies. They are scared to death about what happens if CUSMA negotiations fail. These are not abstract fears. These are payrolls, contracts and livelihoods hanging in the balance, with no backup plan and no margin for error. If this deal fails, the damage will not be theoretical. It will tear straight through communities, with jobs lost, investments frozen, businesses destroyed and families left picking up the pieces.

Will the Prime Minister stop posturing and start thinking about the people who will pay the price here at home, or will Canadians be left carrying the cost of his miscalculations?

**Corey Hogan:** Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right that this is not abstract. This is livelihoods, which is why we cannot get into

sound bites. We need to do the hard work and maintain the best deals possible, which is what Canada has right now.

The CUSMA negotiations will be difficult. We know that, but we also know that Canadians are anticipating and expecting government to work with opposition and get the best deal possible by working with provinces, indigenous peoples and all shareholders and stakeholders across Canada, and that is going to require us to come together.

We have to put aside the rhetoric and get the job done. That is what Canadians expect.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:57 p.m.)

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