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# House of Commons Debates

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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 27, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

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*Prayer*

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• (1000)

[English]

## MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill with an amendment to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill C-4, an act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure.

Copies of the amendment are available at the table.

Through a process called “enfranchisement”, first nations individuals were told that they would gain the basic rights that other Canadians already had. They simply had to give up who they were. They would have the capacity to vote, to own property, to practise law and to become a doctor. Imagine having to make that choice. I recognize that for many individuals who did choose enfranchisement, it was truly not a choice at all. Imagine someone being told that their education, profession or ambition would cost them everything: their identity and their children's identity.

I stand here to speak to Bill S-2, a vital step towards addressing inequities in the Indian Act. It is worth remembering that before 1960, a first nations woman like me would never have had the opportunity to sit in this chamber as a member of Parliament unless she first gave up her status. To serve in Canada's democracy, she would have been required to renounce legal recognition of who she was. That was the price of enfranchisement: participation in exchange for erasure.

Now, for the first time, the indigenous Minister of Indigenous Services is standing before members to advance reform on the very injustices of enfranchisement.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### INDIAN ACT

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.)** moved that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to share my time with the member for Nunavut.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty:** Mr. Speaker, *kwe, kwe. Ulaakut. Tansi. Waajiye. Bonjour.* Hello.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the unceded, surrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

The Indian Act of 1876 is a remnant of our colonial history and an attempt to completely assimilate first nations peoples. It sought to absorb our languages, cultures, governance structures and, ultimately, our identity as first nations.

[Translation]

It is an honour for me to help move forward Bill S-2, which specifically addresses these inequalities.

• (1005)

[English]

This legislation would restore entitlement to approximately 3,500 first nations individuals and their descendants who gave it up or lost it. These are not just numbers on a page. There are more than 3,500 mothers, fathers, children, aunts and grandparents who are all looking for the restoration of identity, dignity and recognition, what they should have always had and what belongs to them.

Across this country, thousands of first nations individuals are waiting for enfranchisement decisions, waiting for their identity to be restored, waiting for their children to be recognized and waiting to be told by Canada what they have always known: that they belong.

*Government Orders*

I have heard first-hand the impacts of enfranchisement on individuals, on their families and on their communities. They have been clear that it is imperative to avoid delay and that changes are needed in the Indian Act. Their message is that they cannot, will not and should not continue to be deterred or denied their rightful entitlement any longer.

[Translation]

This bill gives first nations peoples back the power to have their name removed from the Indian register and take back control of their identity.

It also amends the act to remove outdated and offensive language related to dependent persons, language that is a legacy of colonial mindsets. In addition, it makes it easier to reaffiliate individuals, particularly women, with their natal first nations band.

[English]

These changes matter because they correct real harms and bring people home. Bill S-2 is a step in the right direction.

I want to share and state clearly that I recognize that it does not address all inequities in the Indian Act. The second-generation cut-off rule continues to harmfully erode entitlement over generations. Under the rule, if an entitled person marries someone who is not entitled, their children hold entitlement, but their future children, the second generation, do not.

This is a critical issue that must be addressed the right way. I want to reiterate today that the question is not how we will do it, but when we will do it. We need to follow the lead of the community to ensure that the solutions we bring forward are not only supported by the community but have the consensus of rights holders.

[Translation]

That is why we launched the collaborative process in November 2023 to address the second-generation cut-off and section 10 voting thresholds.

[English]

Many first nations and organizations have developed proposals for solutions to these very issues, and through the advisory council, the proposals are presently being studied and evaluated based on legal viability. This work is grounded in lived experience, community knowledge and the realities of administering membership systems. Broad consultation, the second phase, will focus on these solutions and be quickly launched in the coming weeks.

Advancing these amendments to Bill S-2 without meeting the legal duty to consult would repeat outdated processes that unilaterally impose a legislative solution, not to mention further jeopardizing the status of thousands of individuals who have been waiting in limbo for the bill to pass, to address enfranchisement.

[Translation]

I am firmly committed to addressing the second-generation cut-off, but we must respect this fundamental principle or we risk repeating the very wrongs we are seeking to right.

[English]

Getting this next step right is important. Legislative change without implementation readiness is not reconciliation. That is why addressing the second-generation cut-off requires a distinct legislative path forward, one that allows space for meaningful engagement with partners and also for government and communities to be prepared to support the changes that need to be made.

[Translation]

While we are engaging in the collaboration process with first nations on broader reforms, we cannot ignore the urgent need to help people who are waiting right now, people who have applied to register and been denied because of enfranchisement, people whose parents or grandparents were forced to choose between their identity and their children's safety.

● (1010)

[English]

People have lived in this system without recognition, because the system was designed to erase their rights. The court decision in the Nicholas case found that certain registration provisions in the Indian Act violated the equality rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court gave Parliament a deadline to act. That April 2026 deadline is fast approaching.

If we fail to pass the bill in this time, we risk leaving 3,500 people behind. We risk creating uncertainty for families who have already endured too much. Further, we risk unequal application of the Indian Act across the country, and we risk allowing unconstitutional provisions to remain in force. This cannot happen. While I know and address this as a colonial policy, I want to ensure that the solutions that we bring forward are going to be based in further protecting the implementation process of what they are designed to do to ensure that we bring forward equality. We want to also make sure that we are fighting to protect community, and that they are leading the solutions, the true message of reconciliation.

Experience grounds me and reminds me that this work is deeply personal, including for me and for my own family. I carry that with me every time I stand in this place. We have the opportunity before us to correct a painful legacy, to restore the rights that were unjustly taken from thousands of people asked to make a simple choice that perpetuated further harm.

Bill S-2 is necessary, it is urgent, and it is a meaningful step towards justice. I urge for the passing of the bill as it was originally introduced to Parliament, so those who have waited far too long do not have to wait any longer.

**Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech and acknowledge the history that she spoke about and the history that she personally represents. I am very proud to see that happen in my lifetime.

*Government Orders*

In this House, we have legislation that affects first nations on multiple issues. Earlier in this Parliament, we talked about things like Bill C-5. We debated an Alberta MOU. At that time, first nations were complaining that there was no consultation with them.

On this one, the opposite is happening. First nations are saying they do not need any more consultation to do the right thing and end discrimination in the Indian Act. Could the minister address that double standard? Why is the government delaying things, such as to end sex discrimination, but on other things it does consultation?

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty:** Mr. Speaker, Bill S-2 in its original form was intended to look at enfranchisement, one of the challenges with the Indian Act. I can answer that there are many cases of discrimination under the Indian Act.

I am looking for a solution that is going to ensure we are able to reach consensus on what the solution truly is. In this case, the amendments put forward are looking to implement a one-parent solution, but is that truly the only solution that we can bring forward? Is it blood quantum? Is it the one-parent rule? Are there alternatives?

We should challenge ourselves to do more and allow communities to maintain jurisdiction over their lists and make decisions for themselves.

**Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I thank the minister for her important presentation.

Does the minister support the amendments that were made by the Senate committee on this study? They made very important amendments that would help to equalize first nations rights so that they are on par with Canadians' rights.

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty:** Mr. Speaker, once again, the intention of Bill S-2 was to address the enfranchisement and the return of 3,500 people. This is how the bill was framed.

I want to commend the Senate for the work they do and the important history of speaking to this file and the discrimination that the Indian Act has in place. At the same time, I also want to ensure that it is clear with my colleagues that we have launched a collaborative process that is engaging with community and asking them to submit proposals that are presently being looked at for legal risk and legal validity, to ensure the solutions we bring forward are going to be upheld and truly meet the standard of what a solution should be for community.

While we are doing this consultation process, it is imperative that their voice be part of the solution, building well beyond what is offered in the amendments.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Bloc Québécois supports Bill S-2. It restores an important right, the right to transmit status.

What does the minister think of the Indian Act in general?

First of all, the name of the act no longer works. There are sections in it that need to be reviewed. Should we not be doing even

more to recognize first nations' rights and achieve a true nation-to-nation partnership?

I hope that a sovereign Quebec can do that soon, but I would also like to see Canada begin this work.

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty:** Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that this is one of the biggest challenges I face as Minister of Indigenous Services. I have to work with a law that is highly discriminatory against Canada's indigenous peoples.

That is why my approach to finding solutions will be based on the guidance I receive from the community. We must prioritize including indigenous peoples to ensure that solutions are adopted by and for them.

[*English*]

**Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the minister for her phenomenal leadership in this regard. It gives me great pleasure to be in the assembly as I listen to her mark this day with a very important speech and something that I think we can all be proud of as Canadians.

My question to the minister is this: As we celebrate this step, there are many steps forward. What is next on the agenda as she embarks on this bold, new journey?

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his support. There is much work left to be done in terms of the bill itself. I am looking forward to the debate and the process that will be undertaken. This is imperative work. I believe that the voice of leadership across this country, the locally elected chiefs and councils, must participate and bring forward the solutions they are looking for. As I said, it should go beyond the scope of what these amendments are offering.

**Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I would like to thank the minister for sharing her time with me on this important bill, Bill S-2, to amend the Indian Act.

Bill C-38, from the last Parliament, was a bill that I could not support at the time because of the inequities that first nations would continue to have. However, the NDP supports the Senate amendments to Bill S-2 and hopes that the bill will pass quickly. It is about time to finally make sure that first nations women and children get the justice they deserve.

I thank the Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group for its tireless work and advocacy. Its members are role models of what it means to never give up. The working group consists of Sharon McIvor, Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, Cora McGuire-Cyrette, Marjolaine Étienne, Chief Judy Wilson, Dr. Pamela Palmater, Dawn Lavell-Harvard, Dr. Gwen Brodsky, Mary Eberts and Shelagh Day. In their work, they remind us of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report in 2019, where the call for justice 1.2(v) calls on Canada to eliminate gender discrimination in the Indian Act.

### *Government Orders*

It is clear that the Liberal agenda is to delay the passage of Bill S-2 and the Senate amendments by using the need to consult on the “how” and the “range of potential pathways” that need to be consulted on, which I heard during the indigenous and northern affairs committee meeting in February when Lori Doran, director general, individual affairs, Department of Indigenous Services, appeared.

Some of the work that has occurred to fix the discrimination in the Indian Act includes but is not limited to the following: First, Bill C-38 was tabled in the 44th Parliament. Second, Indigenous Services Canada, in 2023, reported that it was beginning a co-development consultation process to address the second-generation cut-off.

Third, the Assembly of First Nations provided a brief in 2020 that said, “Enfranchisement had an impact on all subsequent generations of people. It did not matter if an individual was voluntarily, or involuntarily enfranchised—subsequent generations could not appear on band lists or on the Indian register as status Indians.”

Fourth was *Nicholas v. Canada* in 2011, which required the tabling of Bill C-38. Fifth was Bill S-3's final report to Parliament in December 2020. Sixth were the amendments to the Indian Act, including Bill C-31 in 1985, Bill C-3 in 2010 and Bill S-3 in 2017. I remind Parliament that these amendments, like Bill C-38, were only in response to court cases against the federal government.

I am struck by the stark contrast of pace the Liberal government chooses to make, depending on whether it respects indigenous peoples rights. Very clearly, we see the contrast in how the Liberal government fast-tracked Bill C-5, the One Canadian Economy Act. Bill C-5 became enshrined in Canadian law in record time. It received royal assent on June 26, 2025, only one year and two months after the election.

First nations, Métis and Inuit all called for the federal government to slow down to give indigenous peoples time to understand the potential impact of Bill C-5. The Liberals ignored these calls and used House procedures to ensure a quick passage. They violated the rights of indigenous peoples as required under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They did not receive the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.

● (1020)

Now, in Bill S-2, the Liberals want to do consultations on how to remedy this issue, stating that there is a “range of potential pathways”. All of a sudden, they worry about whether Bill S-2 would be charter-compliant. The Assembly of First Nations supports Bill S-2. In fact, it calls upon the federal government to “immediately and without delay end any and all sex- and race-based discrimination in the Indian Act” in its December 2025 motion in response to Bill S-2.

The delay tactics are so clear to indigenous peoples that we have responses like the one from the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, who stated that they will not participate in the consultations on the second-generation cut-off. They explained, “The consultation process is a clear conflation of status, membership, citizenship, and self-government, which are all separate legal issues”.

The Chiefs of Ontario support amendments that, as stated in the media, “aim to address its longstanding inequities and remove discriminatory language that should never have existed.” They further call on the federal government to “work directly with First Nations to create a framework that allows them to fully control their own membership, free from restrictive federal oversight, with decisions recognized as authoritative for all purposes.”

Instead, the Liberals are opting to consult on how to remedy the issue of the second-generation cut-off. They have stated their so-called concerns about the huge increase of potential members that would happen if Bill S-2 passed.

A leading expert, Dr. Pam Palmater, stated at the indigenous and northern affairs committee that:

There have been no [less] than 10 Supreme Court of Canada cases that said you can't use consultation as a delay. You can't use financial costs by the federal government. None of these excuses are at play.

They also say that you cannot use an incremental approach to get rid of section 15 discrimination, and that's exactly what this is.

Why are they doing it? Well, it's unjust enrichment on Canada's part, because the longer they delay making these amendments, the less money they have to spend on people who should rightfully be included, and then they insulate themselves from liability with non-liability clauses, and that's wrong.

The other thing that I think is really important to remember is that millions of people aren't going to be added. In fact, the estimates are 7,500 people a year, divided over 630 first nations. We all know that with every single amendment, millions were never added. It was 130,000 for Bill C-31, 38,000 for Bill C-3, and Bill S-3 is 88,000 so far, divided among 630 first nations.

The Government of Canada can make substantial changes to the Indian Act to end discrimination, but it has chosen to hide behind future consultations and small legislative steps to say it is making progress.

The NDP calls upon the Liberals to end their delay tactics. I call on them to use the same pace they used in Bill C-5 to expedite the passage of this bill and ensure that discussions with first nations achieve their inherent jurisdiction over citizenship and membership.

● (1025)

**Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think everyone can agree that the Indian Act has challenges, that the Indian Act has created discrimination and that we need to move beyond the second-generation cut-off. However, there is no consensus out there on what the solution is.

My question for the member opposite is this: If there is a community out there that does not want these amendments, if there is a community out there that wants something else, if there is a community that wants to do it themselves without Parliament and the Senate telling them how to run their communities, should we force this on them? Should they not be given the option to opt into something, as opposed to the Senate or Parliament saying they know what is best for that community?

**Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, I will remind the member that those kinds of questions should have been asked when they were expediting Bill C-5. They did not take into consideration that there had been different solutions and different things requested by different first nations, Métis and Inuit, yet they were able to expedite the passing of Bill C-5. If they were able to do that with that bill, they should be able to do it with Bill S-2 as amended.

**Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Indigenous Services covers Inuit, Métis and first nations, in particular. It is my understanding that Inuit people have no second-generation cut-off rule and Métis people have no second-generation cut-off rule, but first nations do.

Could the member reflect on the injustices under that ministry and how that definition cannot continue to go forward?

**Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, that is an important question. It is definitely very obvious that the federal government has used its colonial efforts to divide and conquer indigenous peoples, be them first nations, Métis or Inuit, and we need to make sure that, as indigenous peoples, we stand in solidarity to make sure that these injustices, such as the second-generation cut-off, are addressed.

[Translation]

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I respect her very much. I want to repeat the question I asked the minister earlier.

Of course, we are in favour of the proposed change but, in our opinion, it is a fairly timid effort to change a law that is still sexist, discriminatory and the list goes on. Does my colleague not think that a next step needs to be taken to establish a true nation-to-nation partnership, which I hope we will eventually be able to do in a sovereign Quebec?

I would like to hear her opinion and learn what the next step would be.

[English]

**Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, I agree with the line of questioning of the member. It does not go far enough. First nations need to achieve their inherent jurisdiction over citizenship and membership. That dialogue needs to go further, and making sure we have swift passage of Bill S-2, with the Senate amendments, would help push that agenda forward.

• (1030)

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, this legislation certainly needs the amendments of the Senate. Bill S-2 must include dealing with the first-generation cut-off.

I want to ask the hon. member if she heard an answer when she asked the minister if the government was prepared to support the

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Senate amendments so this bill could be passed expeditiously. I am still not certain, and I ask the hon. member for Nunavut.

**Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, I did not hear a favourable answer, unfortunately, and I think our fight will end up being that we make sure that those Senate amendments are included in Bill S-2, particularly because, for example, in Bill C-38, there was a provision where first nations who had experienced discrimination would have been disallowed from seeking restitution. The Senate amendments to Bill S-2 propose to fix those kinds of injustices.

**Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I chose to come to Ottawa to do right by my constituents, to do right by our country and all its people as defined by Treaty No. 6, and to do right by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all Canadians, including Canada's first nations people.

Bill S-2 would bring justice to first nations people by helping to end discrimination, discrimination that primarily affects first nations women and children. The Senate has rightfully challenged the 45th Parliament of Canada to make history with this bill by, one, addressing the Nicholas decision and, two, ending the second-generation cut-off now. After some reflection, my fellow Conservatives and I are prepared to meet the challenge of the Senate to address the Nicholas decision and end the second-generation cut-off rule now, during this Parliament.

With respect, I hear the indecisiveness on the other side of the House when it comes to this bill, which was introduced by the Liberals themselves. I want to respond to some of the concerns they have raised and the notions presented.

One is consultation. Of course consultation is important and is best practice, but first nations feel they have already been consulted on this for decades.

The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs recently stated:

We cannot...support yet another consultation process on how to end the second-generation cut-off when, through decades of research, court cases, collaboration, engagement, and studies, you are aware that the sex- and race-based discrimination violates s. 15 of the Charter, s. 35 rights....

Sharon McIver, a kokum champion with the Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group, recently wrote the government to say:

In light of the Senate's amendments, the justification for further consultation is extremely unclear. It seems to be a delay tactic. But the consultation process is also conflating and confusing status, membership, citizenship, and self-government, which are all separate legal issues.

I, myself, being a former chief, a status Indian and an MP, have heard time and time again from coast to coast that the second-generation cut-off has been breaking families up since 1985 and it needs to end yesterday.

*Government Orders*

I also challenge the Liberals to be more principled when it comes to consultation in their loose application of the *Mikisew v. Canada* 2018 decision principles. How is it that the Liberals can justify further delay through consultation in ending the second-generation cut-off on Bill S-2 but did not consult before passing bills in Parliament, such as Bill C-5, and signing the Alberta MOU?

The minister has heard concerns expressed by chiefs and communities about how this affects membership and costs for first nations. I acknowledge the concerns of chiefs on shortcomings when it comes to housing, education, child welfare, water and infrastructure. Those issues also need systematic fixes, but outside of this legislation. We must not let perfect get in the way of progress.

In addition, on the projected numbers for this bill, the government says that this bill would add approximately 22,000 people in the first year to the status Indian registry and approximately 7,000 to 8,000 net new people per year for the next 30 to 40 years. The direct costs are those basic social supports that ISC covers, which are projected to be approximately \$50 million of a \$25-billion budget. This pales in comparison to the billions spent and the numbers added by the Liberal mismanagement of immigration over the last decade.

Finally, there are the legalities of this. It has never been the case that Canada has voluntarily amended the Indian registry provisions after conducting nationwide consultations. The *Vriend v. Alberta* 1998 decision says, “Groups that have historically been the target of discrimination cannot be expected to wait patiently for the protection of their human dignity and equal rights while governments move toward reform one step at a time.” Failing to quickly act is a denial of charter rights. The decision continues, “If the infringement of the rights and freedoms of these groups is permitted to persist while governments fail to pursue equality diligently, then the guarantees of the Charter will be reduced to little more than empty words.”

Possibly out of a fear of risk, the government is choosing to focus on excuses, but the risk of doing nothing is greater. We have a chance now to change the narrative. The government can be proactive in reconciliation by doing the right thing now before going through long, costly litigation to end sex discrimination in the Indian Act.

As Conservatives, we want to help lead a new chapter in reconciliation. We are proud to be an opposition that challenges the government to meet higher standards. That is the power of Parliament and its relationship with first nations peoples. It is a relationship that can be one of the defining aspects that shows that the House can work together rather than being defined by political differences.

Mr. Speaker, I need to ask for unanimous consent to share my time with my colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Billy Morin:** Mr. Speaker, just yesterday I was proud to sit in the House and witness my Conservative colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes be supported with the unanimous consent of all parties to amend the Criminal Code to end coerced and forced ster-

ilization, which unfortunately disproportionately affects indigenous women and girls. It was a powerful moment between all parties that will bring justice and hope for the future.

• (1035)

Furthermore, the 45th Parliament is unique. In 2025, Canada helped elect the first indigenous woman to become Minister of Indigenous Services, and I am proud to have been asked by our Conservative leader to sit as the shadow ISC minister. I respectfully challenge the minister and offer my help and advice for the work necessary to help end discrimination against women and children and end the second-generation cut-off in that work.

I give thanks to my fellow Conservatives for giving me the ability to issue that challenge, which is rooted in aligning first nation and Conservative values to end discrimination. It is also rooted in aligning values, such as self-determination and self-responsibility, lower government control of the people, the protection of traditions and the transmitting of those traditions down through generations, and the protection of the institution of family to keep families together. Conservative values and indigenous values can align.

This is ultimately about keeping families together. Since the Senate initiated this challenge, I have heard some of the toughest stories. If the government is truly about nation-to-nation relationships and reconciliation, it will have to act to respond to these stories by getting rid of the second-generation cut-off and honouring the Nicholas decision.

There are stories such as that of a chief from Manitoba who raised her daughter with language, culture and ceremony, but because of the second-generation cut-off, the chief's daughter is systematically not a first nations person. Who is the government to uphold the law in telling the chief that her daughter is less than others in her own family? This is certainly not reconciliation, and it is not nation to nation.

We have heard from an uncle who signed a nephew's birth certificate so that the child did not have to be ostracized from their own community and from a kokum who lives on reserve and is transitioning to her spirit journey who is not able to pass on her life's belongings and her home to her children and grandchildren. We heard from first nations entrepreneurs, including an owner who will be forced to sell his business to a band in order to keep it indigenous-owned because his daughter is non-status. We listened to the AFN youth council speak to how they are not leaders of tomorrow, but leaders of today, who are there to address the government on this issue because they will ultimately not be a part of seeing whole first nations communities and families go extinct in their lifetime.

There is a longer-term, principled fix here. The ISC minister and my own community have found it. Membership and families should be defined by the first nations themselves, not by Ottawa. Nearly half of first nations have found the solution, and the government should focus its efforts on the capacity to facilitate first nations to move from section 11 to section 10 bands, or modern, self-government, self-determining agreements with the federal government.

The first nations need to meet Canada halfway and make this a priority by putting in the work to define their own membership laws. That was my attitude when I was chief, and it is the attitude I still carry to this day as a Conservative member of Parliament. First nations are the masters of their own destiny, not Ottawa.

Ottawa needs to focus less on political ISC programs and more on the systematic empowering of indigenous peoples. I am proud to say that this is also the guiding principle of our Conservative leader and the Conservative team when it comes to indigenous-Canada relationships. I think all members of the House know that to be true, but the House has to be better at acting on that principle.

I am finding the balance of being an MP and a person with first nation status. When my time here is done, I cannot look back and say that I did nothing to speak to and act against the extinction of first nations people, which by some accounts will peak in approximately 30 years. I am here to honour the principle of treaty that Canadians and first nations people will work together as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow.

I challenge the Liberals to not use delay tactics when it is politically convenient, to show leadership and to put in the work to pass Bill S-2, which honours the Nicholas decision and gets rid of the second-generation cut-off, expediently during this Parliament.

• (1040)

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to also acknowledge and echo the challenges of being a first nation person doing this critical work.

We know this bill has been put forward as something to address enfranchisement as part of the Indian Act. If we are truly going to support the process of community having jurisdiction and authority over defining membership and status, will my colleague support and create the space needed for community to do that work internally and have authority over choosing procedure, or will my colleague support amendments that would eliminate the opportunity for them to do so?

### *Government Orders*

**Billy Morin:** Mr. Speaker, ultimately, as I said, the decisions and the destiny of first nations and indigenous people lie in their own communities. I agree with that principle, but I also think that this is a delay tactic from the Liberals. Quite frankly, it is not consistent with their position when it came to not consulting on Bill C-5 and on Alberta's MOU.

Right now, I think that first nations have that opportunity. The amendments contemplate a one-year transition period, but there is more than ample opportunity and resources for first nations to do the right thing, which they want to do, to move their own membership definitions.

[*Translation*]

**Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague and tell him that the House is fairly unanimous in supporting Bill S-2.

However, I am curious to know whether he thinks it might be time to go a little further and carry out a more in-depth overhaul of the Indian Act. My Bloc colleague said that the name of the act itself is repulsive.

Is it not time to take things to the next level and go even further in our relationship with first nations?

[*English*]

**Billy Morin:** Mr. Speaker, ultimately, the Indian Act needs to be dispelled, but it is first nations that have to be the primary driver of that. I agree with my colleague in that regard.

For this legislation, I accept the amendments the Senate made. Again, we cannot let perfect get in the way of progress. The Indian Act is still going to be generations and decades ahead at different paces for first nations communities, but ultimately what we are talking about here today is the federal government's relationship specifically to status individuals, and government being able to lead on that to get rid of it today and get rid of discrimination.

**Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who is in my neighbouring riding. He will be well aware of the history of the Michel band in Sturgeon County, one of the only first nations in Canada that was forcibly enfranchised.

I am wondering if he can talk about the impact this legislation would have on first nations peoples like those in the Michel band and how we can do a better job of creating reconciliation to recognize first nations' status in this country.

*Government Orders*

**Billy Morin:** Mr. Speaker, ultimately, the original version of the bill is Bill C-38 through the Nicholas decision, and it affects primarily the Michel band in particular, of over 3,000 people approximately. I think the Liberals are phrasing this as one or the other. We can have both, and we can make history today. The government has traditionally gone through litigation to change the Indian Act. This time it can redefine reconciliation and be proactive to stay out of long, costly court cases and do both to honour the Michel band but also get rid of the second-generation cut-off for generations to come, today.

**Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, very quickly, could the member share with us whether the Conservatives will support the amendments that were made by the Senate?

**Billy Morin:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives support the amendments made by the Senate.

**Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure, as always, to rise to speak in the House. Today, it is on Bill S-2, an act to amend the Indian Act, legislation that would make an important step toward correcting long-standing discrimination in the registration provisions of the Indian Act.

Before I get into the meat of my speech, I would like to thank and congratulate my colleague, the member for Edmonton Northwest, on his inspiring words today. He gave a great speech, and he provides great leadership in our caucus on many issues, including the indigenous file. It is a pleasure to work with him and many others as we move forward.

At its heart, Bill S-2 is about justice. It is about equality. It is about ensuring that first nations families are no longer divided by outdated rules that have no place in a modern, charter-compliant Canada.

It is important to note that Bill S-2 has two main parts. The first deals with enfranchisement. In the past, first nations women have been less able than first nations men to pass on their status to their children and grandchildren. That has meant that families have been separated, unfortunately, by bureaucracy. It has meant that parents are unable to pass on their identity, their rights, their homes and their traditions.

The bill would also work to correct wrongs in terms of the people having to give up their status to avoid such things as fighting for Canada in a conflict or avoiding the horrors that Canada has inflicted, such as the sixties scoop, among many, many others. It would move us toward a simple and fair principle, that first nations women and men have the same ability to pass on their status to their children. Conservatives supported that main piece of legislation in a previous Parliament, and we still support it to this day.

As for the second part, there are the amendments made in the Senate, which talk about eliminating the second-generation cut-off, because quality under the law is not negotiable. We have heard from many first nations families that have spent years and even decades navigating complex registration rules and that feel their line is coming to an end, not because of their choices but because of a technical formula imposed by the government.

The second-generation cut-off was introduced in 1985 through Bill C-31. It applied only to people born after April of that year, but

over time, its effect has been clear. It does not simply manage registration; it also legislates the gradual disappearance of status Indians. Some have called this an administrative policy, but for families facing the end of their legal identity, it is not administrative; it is existential.

Bill S-2 is not a one-drop rule. It would not open the door to distant or speculative claims. It would apply to the children and grandchildren of current status holders, people whose connection to their community is real, recent and meaningful. Removing the cut-off would also allow families to pass on homes on reserve, family businesses and traditional rights. It would allow parents to pass on not only legal recognition but also culture, language and livelihood. This is about survival, not expansion.

The bill would also align the transmission of first nation status with a principle that Canadians already understand. In Canada, citizenship is passed on through one parent. Inuit and Métis recognition follows a similar logic. The one-parent rule reflects how identity is carried forward in families. Bill S-2 would restore that same principle for first nations, fairly and equally for both men and women. It would go beyond what the courts have required.

The Nicholas decision addressed only individuals who enfranchised personally. Bill S-2 and its predecessor extend fairness to people whose entire bands were enfranchised, ensuring that no community is left behind. Let us also remember what enfranchisement meant. First nations people were forced to give up their status simply to vote, to own property or to access basic rights. Today we are still repairing the consequences of those policies.

Some people have raised concerns about numbers and costs, so let us look at the facts. Stats Canada estimates that between 200,000 and 320,000 people may become entitled over the next forty years. That is roughly 5,000 to 7,500 people per year after the initial phase. Spread across more than 630 first nations, that is about a dozen people per community per year. This is not a flood. It is a gradual and manageable restoration of rights.

*Government Orders*

• (1045)

We also know from previous legislation that the projected uptake is rarely reached. Past reforms saw far fewer registrations than were expected. In some cases, fewer than 12% of eligible individuals actually registered. Most new registrants will live in urban areas and continue their existing lives. The Parliamentary Budget Officer previously found that virtually none moved onto reserve after earlier reforms.

The estimated cost is about \$2,000 per registrant per year, which would represent only about 2.5% of the operating budget of Indigenous Services Canada over time. To put this into perspective, Canada welcomes more than 300,000 newcomers each year, and records hundreds of thousands of births annually. Compared to that, the number of new registrants under Bill S-2 would be modest. Most importantly, cost cannot be used to justify denying charter equality rights.

There are no misconceptions about tax advantages and benefits. The reality is that tax exemptions apply largely on reserve and are rooted in pre-Confederation protections to preserve first nations' economic capacity. Income tax exemptions apply only to the people who live and work on reserve. Many commonly cited benefits are limited or do not apply in urban settings. This legislation is not about special treatment. It is about equal treatment.

Others have raised concerns about fishing rights or community resources, but food, social and ceremonial fisheries are collective rights administered by first nations governments. The modest increase in membership expected under the bill would not create sudden or disruptive changes. What would be disruptive would be allowing the current rules to continue, because if the second-generation cut-off remains, the long-term outcome is clear: fewer and fewer status Indians in each generation. In some regions, legal status could disappear entirely within decades. This is not reconciliation. This is legislated extinction.

This legislation also reflects the long tradition of expanding rights in Canada. Conservative governments have supported major equality measures, including the restoration of status through Bill C-31 and Bill C-3, the extension of voting rights to first nations peoples in 1960, the Canadian Bill of Rights, the Employment Equity Act and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Time and again when Canada has faced a choice between maintaining outdated systems and improving equality and expanding it, we have chosen to expand and improve equality. Bill S-2, of course, would continue that tradition.

There is also a practical consideration. Passing the legislation would now keep the Indian Act compliant with the charter and reduce the need for ongoing litigation. Instead of waiting to be taken to court again and again, Parliament could now act proactively to fix discrimination where it exists.

The proposed one-year implementation period, I and many on this side believe, is reasonable. It would allow Indigenous Services Canada to address technical issues and improve processing capacity, including reducing the current backlog of more than 12,000 applications.

At the same time, we support first nations' authority to develop and manage their own membership codes. Status under the Indian Act and band membership are distinct, and communities must retain the ability to define their own belonging.

At its core, Bill S-2 is not about numbers, budgets or administrative systems. It is about families. It is about a mother who is unable to pass along the status to her child. It is about an angler who cannot take their child onto the boat because that child lacks status. It is about grandparents who fear their legal identity would end with the next generation. For those families, the legislation matters deeply and is the difference between disappearance and continuity.

Status Indians represent less than 5% of Canada's total population, but equality is not determined by numbers. Rights are not reserved for majorities. Justice does not depend on scale. If we believe in reconciliation and in equality between men and women, and if we believe that first nations identity should not be legislated out of existence, then the path forward is clear.

Bill S-2 would restore fairness, strengthen families, align the law with the charter and help to ensure that first nations identity can be carried forward to future generations. I urge all members of the House to support it and take this important step toward justice, equality and reconciliation.

• (1050)

**Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am quite surprised that my colleague is willing to support the bill only if members remain in urban areas, and that this is equal treatment of first nations people. Therefore I am not sure I can truly support the position and reasoning he is bringing forward.

If communities accept this process, are they not continuing to support the further discrimination of the Indian Act because their members remain out of territory or out of community? I want to understand how the Conservatives intend to provide the opportunity to first nations communities to develop status, membership and authority of their members who reside off community, which the bill would not offer.

*Statements by Members*

● (1055)

**Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think the minister heard exactly what I said because that is not exactly what I said. That is not even close to what I said. That description was in the context that in the vast majority of cases, status Indians, as they are called in the act, live off-reserve. I was making the link that some choose to return home, but in the scale that it could happen in a manageable fashion, the nations themselves would have time and capacity to prepare for those wanting to move home. I think that is something we all consent to. I think the minister clearly misheard me, because that is not what I said at all.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I have the pleasure of serving alongside him on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

I have a question for him. The committee is currently conducting a study that deals broadly with the right to registration, as well as the consultations the government would hold to address the gaps that remain in this bill regarding registration. I have a theory, but I am not sure about it, which is why I want to ask my colleague a question. I am concerned that this could result in a delay or that the Supreme Court could even be asked to postpone the passage of such a bill in order to deal with the other provisions.

Does my colleague share my fear that Bill S-2 will not be passed with the proposed amendments and that the adoption of such provisions could be put off indefinitely?

[*English*]

**Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, it is good to see the member for the Bloc on the indigenous and northern affairs committee once again. It is always a pleasure to work with her and to have her knowledge and leadership on the file. As my colleague from Edmonton Northwest pointed out, the government likes to choose when consultation works, and when it does not, as the member for Edmonton pointed out, there is a path forward. Nations that are ready are willing to step up and take this on.

I know the government seems to want to buy more time for the department of indigenous services to figure all this out. There is capacity within the department, but there has to be leadership on the political level. We hope the Liberal government takes that.

**Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since I have come here as a new member of Parliament, I have witnessed ISC over the last number of years go from 4,000 to 8,000 employees. I have seen ISC programs double and the results for first nations and indigenous peoples come down.

Can the member reflect on how focusing on empowerment through root causes is better than focusing on expanding budgets for government bureaucracy and bloated programs?

**Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Edmonton Northwest for his leadership on the file. That is absolutely correct. We have brought up many times in committee and in the House the expansive role ISC has. It was taken from a mere, although I cannot say “mere”, 4,000 or so employees when the split happened be-

tween ISC and CIRNAC all the way to 8,000 employees and still counting, yet the actual results in community have gotten worse.

Something we continue to press on this side of the House is that if the increase in spending is happening, which we support, we want to see results equal to that spending, and right now the government has not done that.

**Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am so happy to hear that the Conservatives will be supporting the amendments coming out of the Senate, and I am shocked that the Liberals are so adamant to keep sexism in the Indian Act. That is going to result in the extinction of first nations people. As a first nations woman, I am very offended. I am wondering what led the Conservatives to take the right position in this instance, to ensure respect for first nations people and our rights.

**Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, there is a long history of Conservatives supporting progress with indigenous people and repairing that relationship that has been broken for over 100 years. It was John Diefenbaker, a Conservative prime minister, who returned voting, which was wrongly taken by a Liberal government under Laurier. As such, there are many instances of Conservatives showing leadership.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

### BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish everyone a happy Black History Month. Earlier this week, I spoke with a fabulous group of high school students. One of them asked me if I had ever encountered racism myself and how I overcame it.

[*English*]

Of course I have. On more than one occasion, I have been confronted with the N-word, and in the moment, I find it bewildering. After all, what does a racist want me to do? My skin is brown. I cannot change that. I do not want to change that.

To a racist, I say this is not my problem but their problem. They do not like Black people? I say good luck with that. They might want to seek some help because their life is going to be needlessly painful if they cannot accept the reality of my skin or that the sky is blue or that the sun always rises in the east.

[*Translation*]

February is a month for celebrating our identity, our presence and our ongoing contributions. I wish all my colleagues here in the House a happy Black History Month.

[English]

#### LINDA PACE

**Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Clarke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a very special member of our community, Linda Jean Lorraine Pace. On January 3, God welcomed Linda home. She leaves behind three loving children and a legacy of service, love and a true example of what it means to be a Proverbs 31 woman.

Linda's mark on our community will never be forgotten. She was heavily involved with the Mission Thrift Store in Cobourg and volunteered at the Church on the Hill, the Coventry Relief Kitchen in Colborne and the Salvation Army.

I know Linda's family will not be the only ones who miss her. Her impact on the community was deep and profound. We send our best wishes to the Pace family, and we remember Linda, who exemplified what Proverbs said: "clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future."

\* \* \*

#### ARCTIC WINTER GAMES

**Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the countdown is on. In just over a week, the Arctic Winter Games are returning to Whitehorse. For over 50 years, this event has been the premier athletic stage for circumpolar youth. With over 4,000 athletes, coaches, support staff and volunteers already gearing up, the Yukon is set to continue this proud legacy.

The games are not just about medals. They are about competing together, trading pins and gear and showcasing northern grit. In Arctic sports, athletes will test their limits in traditional events like the one-foot high kick and the knuckle hop, feats of incredible endurance passed down through generations.

Also, do not miss the cultural gala. Here, youth from Nunavut to Alaska to Sápmi will share performances from traditional drumming and throat singing to modern dance. Whether on wrestling mats or on the gala stage, our young ambassadors will proudly show off the north.

I invite members of the House to join me in cheering on what promises to be a fantastic Arctic Winter Games and in thanking all the volunteers and organizers who are showing the world what we are made of. Go, team Yukon, go!

\* \* \*

#### 4-H IN ALBERTA

**David Bexte (Bow River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, head, heart, health and hands is the 4-H pledge. On March 14, I will be attending the 4-H south region's annual communications event in Alberta, which will host approximately 100 young speakers.

I joined 4-H when I was nine years old, and it was there that I learned to stand on my own two feet, speak with confidence and work hard for my neighbours. It was there that I first lived the motto that still guides me today: Learn to do by doing.

4-H provides youth with a structured, hands-on environment where character is built the old-fashioned way. Young people roll

#### Statements by Members

up their sleeves and take on real responsibility. Each year, they develop a project that may focus on life skills or raising livestock. They develop skills in the trades, public speaking, leadership, teamwork, parliamentary procedure and community service. They serve their communities and take pride in a job well done. 4-H prepares young people for whatever path they choose.

I encourage all members of the House to recognize and celebrate the tremendous work of 4-H and the volunteers who make it possible in Alberta, Canada and around the world.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### SCOUTING WEEK 2026

**Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, from February 16 to 22, we celebrated scouting week 2026 with the theme "Proud and United in Scouting".

In Canada, the francophone scouting movement brings together some 10,000 youths and 3,700 volunteers in an active community that brings adventure to life. In my riding, the 24th Orléans scout troop includes 104 outstanding youths who are known for their bravery, team spirit and exemplary commitment. I want to thank everyone who is keeping this francophone movement alive.

I cannot close without applauding the Canadian athletes who proudly represented us in Milan and Cortina, Italy, from February 6 to 22. I congratulate our national capital region athletes, especially Ivanie Blondin, the pride of Orléans, who took home two speed skating medals.

• (1105)

[English]

As our Prime Minister personally shared with Ivanie, we are so proud of her victory.

\* \* \*

#### RON RUSSELL

**Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life of a great man, Ron Russell.

Ron was a farmer and a founder of AgWest equipment in Portage la Prairie, building a brand and reputation across western Canada for quality products and great service. He loved agriculture, making deals and supporting his community. More importantly, Ron was a husband, father, grandfather, friend, mentor and a man whose presence left a lasting impression on everyone fortunate enough to know him. He was always quick with a smile, and that booming laugh of his was always just a split second away. People could not help but smile when they were around Ron.

*Statements by Members*

Ron saw every interaction as a chance to make a friend, of which he collected an uncountable number across North America who will miss him dearly. May his wife Joan, son Murray, daughter Denise and her husband Yuri, his sisters, nieces and nephews, and his grandchildren whom he adored, be blessed with strength from the memories of the way he lived and grateful for the many years they had with him, even through his long battle with cancer. We will miss him.

Rest easy, Uncle Ron.

\* \* \*

**RAMADAN**

**Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we observe the blessed month of Ramadan, I rise to reflect on its enduring values of compassion, self-discipline and service to others. Ramadan is a time when Muslims recommit to justice, generosity and care for the vulnerable, principles that speak to the best of our shared humanity.

This month also arrives as millions around the world endure profound hardship. We cannot ignore the suffering of the Palestinian people who continue to face violence, displacement and persecution in the West Bank and Gaza. As families there struggle for safety, dignity and hope, Ramadan reminds us that indifference is not an option. At its heart, Ramadan calls us to reflection, empathy and moral responsibility. It urges us to listen to the oppressed, stand with those in pain and renew our commitment to human dignity.

May this holy month inspire compassion in our words and conscience in our actions.

\* \* \*

**RECOGNITION OF 40 YEARS OF SERVICE**

**Dan Mazier (Riding Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an outstanding individual from the community of Ste. Rose, Manitoba. Dr. David O'Hagan has dedicated 40 remarkable years to serving the people of Ste. Rose and the surrounding area as a physician.

Originally from South Africa, Dr. O'Hagan chose rural Manitoba as his home, and he has never looked back. It is no secret that finding a doctor willing to plant roots in rural Canada is tough. Too many small towns watch their physicians come and go. Dr. O'Hagan did not just stay but fell in love with his community, raised his family there and made Ste. Rose his life's work.

In rural Canada, a physician who stays is not just a doctor. They become a pillar to the entire community. Dr. O'Hagan and his wife, Bonnie, became that pillar, caring for generations of families with dedication and compassion. I ask all members to join me in thanking Dr. David O'Hagan for his outstanding 40 years of service.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THOMAS DE KONINCK**

**Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on February 16, we were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Thomas De

Koninck, an internationally renowned philosopher and pillar of Université Laval's faculty of philosophy.

Thomas De Koninck will, of course, be remembered as the inspiration for Saint-Exupéry's character the Little Prince, but to students like me who knew him personally, he was a legend in a different way.

He left a lasting impression on generations of students by awakening our desire to learn, nurturing our critical thinking skills, and fostering a love of culture in all its forms. Professor De Koninck had the ability to pass on his passion for great literature and make even the most complex works accessible. He devoted his life to combatting ignorance and promoting human dignity.

On behalf of the thousands of students he moulded into better thinkers, I thank Professor De Koninck. We are freer and more independent thanks to him.

On behalf of his friends Gilbert Larochelle and Jean-François de Raymond, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family of Thomas De Koninck.

\* \* \*

● (1110)

**SCOUTING WEEK 2026**

**Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise this morning to mark scouting week, which took place last week in my riding.

I want to pay tribute to the thousands of young people across the country who are keeping this great movement alive. The franco-phone scouting movement is the largest youth movement in Canada. It brings together nearly 10,000 young people and 3,000 dedicated volunteers. Scouting is not just about outdoor activities. It is a community that helps young people gain confidence, become independent and help others. I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of scouting groups in my riding of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, which have over 75 young members.

I invite all of my colleagues in the House to join me in wishing our young people a very happy scouting week.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**TELEMIRACLE TELETHON**

**Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have shown the country what generosity truly looks like through the incredible tradition of the Kinsmen TeleMiracle telethon.

TeleMiracle brings communities together to raise funds for life-changing medical equipment, mobility supports and specialized care in my province. Saskatchewan residents have helped to raise over \$171 million since 1977. Starting tomorrow, the 22-hour telethon kicks off, marking half a century of entertainment and fundraising.

Congratulations, TeleMiracle, on 50 years as a true Saskatchewan treasure. Where are we going? Higher. Saskatchewan, get ready to ring those phones.

\* \* \*

#### OTTAWA HEART INSTITUTE

**Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when was the last time you thought about the health of your heart? For many Canadians, the risk of cardiovascular disease is not top of mind, but the One Million Canadian Hearts campaign led by the Ottawa Heart Institute, located in my riding of Ottawa Centre, is hoping to change that.

As part of the activities to mark 50 years of operation, the Ottawa Heart Institute has launched this campaign to screen one million Canadians for cardiovascular disease risk factors. This work will raise awareness, enable early treatment and, ultimately, save lives. Fifty years after its founding by Dr. Wilbert Keon, the Ottawa Heart Institute is celebrating a legacy built on innovation, compassion and relentless pursuit of excellence.

Congratulations to everyone who works at the Ottawa Heart Institute on their 50th anniversary.

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#### PEST MANAGEMENT

**Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a perfect storm is brewing on Canada's Prairies, and the Liberal government is refusing to act.

The exploding population of Richardson's ground squirrels and farmers' loss of strychnine to control them spells disaster for the upcoming growing season. Widespread infestations have led to severe damage to cropland and pastures. The removal of a tool that farmers have used for generations is forcing them to resort to far worse alternatives. These ineffective methods of gopher control are resulting in economic losses, more injury to livestock and a crisis for farm and food sustainability.

The Liberal agriculture minister made a commitment to farmers that he would support the application of strychnine for emergency use. The Prime Minister promised to change the mandate of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency to consider the cost of food in all regulatory decisions without putting health and safety at risk. These promises have not been fulfilled.

Canada's farmers are calling on the Liberals to support farmers' choice in pest management and approve the emergency use of strychnine for provinces that request it.

#### Statements by Members

[Translation]

#### FESTIVAL DU VOYAGEUR

**Ginette Lavack (St. Boniface—St. Vital, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the 57th Festival du Voyageur, which just wrapped up in Winnipeg. Created to honour the legacy of the voyageurs and to celebrate western Canada's francophone community, this festival embodies a spirit of courage, solidarity and pride.

The voyageur spirit is what brings nation builders together in the dead of winter to celebrate their culture and pass it down with passion. For close to 60 years, this event has brought thousands of people together to enjoy music, history, food and jaw-dropping snow sculptures. This year, more than 70,000 festival-goers braved the cold. More than 200 artists took to the stage, from the festival's grand opening to the Valentine's Day celebrations, ending with Louis Riel Day. The Festival du Voyageur is the largest francophone cultural event in Manitoba and western Canada.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the organizers, artists and volunteers. Hey ho!

\* \* \*

[English]

#### THE ECONOMY

**Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Prime Minister promised the fastest-growing economy in the G7, but new Statistics Canada data shows that Canada saw its economy shrink last quarter, the only country in the G7 to do so.

After 10 years of deficits, inflation, higher taxes, anti-development laws and bloating bureaucracy, growth has stalled and Canadians are paying the price. While other countries build, the government fails to approve nation-building resource projects. The Major Projects Office has yet to approve a single new project, despite being created in order to move at unimaginable speed. Business has stalled, net capital is leaving and per capita GDP has been flat for a decade while Canadians work harder and fall further behind. This is the result of Liberal policies blocking development, suppressing productivity and driving away investment.

Now that Canada is the only G7 country with a shrinking economy, will the Liberals finally get their taxes and bureaucracies out of the way and stop making things worse, so Canada can build, invest and grow?

*Oral Questions*

● (1115)

**CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is about a team Canada approach. Every Liberal member of Parliament understands the importance of the Canada-U.S.A. trade. Every Liberal member of Parliament does. While the leader of the Conservative Party is trying to reset his trade position, we have a Conservative member of Parliament who travels to the U.S.A., meets with the President and meets with the Vice-President. What does he come back saying? He says in Canada we are “shooting ourselves in the foot” with our “anti-America...hissy fit” on trade.

Shame on the Conservative Party. If we take a look at the Cuba issue, we have a Conservative MP who is saying that Canada should not be contributing to Cuba, but the deputy leader of the Conservative Party says he is wrong, that we should.

Who is actually making foreign policy in the Conservative Party today?

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian economy is suffering the effects of unjustified tariffs from the Trump administration in the U.S.

The Conservatives propose creating a strategic critical mineral reserve as well as an all-party CUSMA working group to address these challenges and to create a tariff-free auto pact. This would restore our leverage and support Canadian manufacturing.

Will the government work with us to ensure that Canada can negotiate trade deals that benefit our workers and our economy?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, to answer my colleague directly, obviously we can. We can get to a good deal. This is exactly why the Prime Minister is engaged, but this is also exactly why our colleague, the Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, is in Washington today, meeting with the U.S. Trade Representative to do that work.

That being said, we took good note of what the Leader of the Opposition said yesterday at the Economic Club of Canada, and we are very happy that a lot of our program is being copied.

**Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have consistently demonstrated a willingness to work with the government to get results for Canadians in the face of these unjustified tariffs from U.S. President Donald Trump. Look at the constructive amendments to the budget bill that were adopted and our support for efforts to relieve taxes on Canadians in this challenging time.

Our proposal for an all-party CUSMA working group to get a tariff-free auto pact and to create a strategic critical mineral reserve

would help us to negotiate from a position of strength, so will the government accept our offer to work together to get the best results in the interests of all Canadians?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are lots of things we cannot control. Certainly we cannot control the White House, but there are lots of things we can control. What we can control is how to build one strong Canadian economy.

Who said that first? It was the Prime Minister. Who copied that yesterday? That was the Leader of the Opposition.

Of course, we will work on an auto pact that is tariff-free. Of course, we will work to have a strong critical mineral supply. Of course, we are willing to work as one team Canada. The Conservatives should just get on board.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the numbers are in, and Canada's economy shrank during the fourth quarter of 2025. In fact, Canada's economy is the only shrinking economy in the G7. The Prime Minister promised to build the strongest economy in the G7. Instead, he has delivered the weakest.

In the face of that, will the Prime Minister accept any responsibility for the dismal state of Canada's economy?

● (1120)

**Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting that when the Conservatives cite reports, they cite only part of the report.

Of course it is unfortunate that we saw a contraction of 0.6% in real GDP, but what else does the report say? It says that consumer demand is up. It says that domestic business investment is up. As my colleague is very well read, I am sure he read in Bloomberg yesterday that, beyond that, there is the highest foreign direct investment Canada has seen since 2007, at almost \$100 billion.

A major nation-building project is exactly what this country is engaged in to bring jobs and purchasing power. We will achieve exactly that.

**Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here is the reality. Under the current Prime Minister's watch, more investment dollars have left Canada than have come in. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has doubled down on the worst policies of Justin Trudeau: higher taxes, inflationary spending and the same anti-development laws. Not a single major project has been approved.

With a record like that, is it any wonder that Canada has the worst economy in the G7?

**Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, while the apparent new trade critic or maybe foreign affairs critic from Bowmanville—Oshawa North talks about a hissy-fit doctrine with the Conservative Party, what is this government doing under the Prime Minister's leadership? It is forging new trade relationships and forging new investment opportunities. We see the results in terms of foreign direct investment in a nation-building agenda that will lead, as I said, to new jobs and the purchasing power that comes from those along the way.

We know that those results are not immediate, of course. We are cutting taxes for Canadians. We are continuing to put in affordability measures. We will continue to be there for the people of this country. It is a serious agenda for a serious time.

[Translation]

**Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised us the most dynamic economy in the G7. Statistics Canada released data today that tells a different story. The GDP shrank by 0.2% in the last quarter of last year. Canada is now the only G7 country whose economy is in decline.

Given that our per capita GDP is stagnating and that Canadians are working harder but only falling further behind, when will this government stop stifling our economy with its taxes and bureaucracy so that we can be competitive with our allies again?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, but I have to correct her because we created more jobs last year than the United States did. We created 189,000 jobs while the United States created 181,000 jobs, even though the U.S. economy is 10 times bigger than Canada's.

What is more, our exports are growing. Exports to Europe have increased by 31%, on top of increases of 8% for Latin America, 18% for Africa and 6% for Asia. We are also a foreign investment destination for the first time in 18 years.

We are working on attracting lots of investment to Canada.

**Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the most recent data. Today's report shows an alarming trend.

For the third year in a row, government spending is artificially boosting GDP, while business investment is declining. In the auto sector, production has dropped by half since these Liberals came to power, threatening thousands of jobs. Projects are on hold, and capital is fleeing the country.

### Oral Questions

When will the government cut the red tape and give Canada's entrepreneurs some breathing room?

**Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague mentioned, when one is reading a report, it would be a good idea to read it in its entirety. In this case, the report shows that, in the fourth quarter of this year, domestic demand was very strong and private investment has picked back up.

The bottom line is, the only negative aspect of the fourth-quarter GDP report was a sharp drop in inventory. Generally, when inventories drop like that, it means that production will pick up again in the next quarter, so we are ending in a strong position.

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### PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, imagine retiring and then not receiving an OAS pension for nine months. That is the kind of problem that 85,000 people are experiencing because of the Cúram software. What is more, the 85,000 is a figure dating from the end of January. The minister has not updated the figures yet. Let us hope that they have improved. However, on Monday, the president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada said that, in the long run, he feared that millions of people might be affected.

When will there be an independent public inquiry into this fiasco before it gets worse?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member opposite, I would recommend that he read the Auditor General's report on the modernization of benefits or the testimony and two reports from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, one from 2011 and the other from last fall.

Of course we are working to address the backlog. Let us keep in mind that this is the largest digital project ever undertaken by the Government of Canada.

● (1125)

**Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it cost \$6.5 billion, so I hope it is the biggest project ever undertaken. It is getting expensive.

There are 85,000 victims of errors related to Cúram. There could be more. No one knows for sure. Cost overruns amount to \$5 billion. The Liberals keep insisting that there is no problem and tell us to read the reports. We are reading the reports.

That is precisely why the Quebec National Assembly is unanimously calling for an independent public inquiry into federal computer programs. We will finally find out, once and for all, exactly who has been wronged and what the cost overruns are. This mess needs to be cleaned up, once and for all.

### Oral Questions

When will an inquiry be launched? That is what transparency looks like.

[English]

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been at this all week. Let me try to correct the member opposite's assertions. There is no cost overrun. The first phase of this project is on track with respect to modernizing old age security. There are other phases of work still to come, similarly to modernize EI and Canada pension plan benefits. The Auditor General has looked at this. The public accounts committee has looked at this. The government provided a response to the House based on the parliamentary committee's report. Let us stop sowing confusion on this and get back to the facts.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### INDUSTRY

**Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Quebec company Lithion will be bought out by the Americans if Ottawa does not invest \$30 million by March 3. There are four days left to avoid losing another company in our battery industry, this time to an American rival heavily subsidized by Washington.

The battery recycling market is expected to top \$70 billion by 2040. It is worth the investment. Abandoning a Quebec company to the Americans due to a lack of federal intervention is exactly the opposite of the Prime Minister's election promises.

Will the Liberals support Lithion?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been in discussions with the company. We know that the company is facing financial difficulties. The Quebec government has decided not to move forward with supporting this company. However, we believe in the battery sector. We also believe that Lithion has significant assets that tie in with our strength in critical minerals. I have worked with the Bloc Québécois before to find solutions, and we will find a solution.

\* \* \*

[English]

### THE ECONOMY

**Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Liberals sure love to talk a good game. For months, they have been saying they are going to build the fastest-growing economy in the G7. I mean, at least they got the fastest right. The problem is that it is actually the fastest-shrinking economy in the G7. That was just reported. This is what we get when we get a Liberal government that is all talk, all photo ops and all fancy announcements, but the reality is that they are driving the Canadian economy into the ditch.

When will the Liberals recognize their fancy photo ops and fancy announcements are not an actual plan to get the Canadian economy to grow?

**Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member talks about posturing and pretending. I hate to do this. Do I have to remind him, though, about just a few weeks ago? He is very big on labour issues, apparently. He made a whole thing in here about CAMI in Ingersoll and did not even talk to the union in question. He failed to talk to their members. He failed to talk to their leadership. He made this whole point about severance pay. I hate to remind him again, but if he is being serious on the floor of the House of Commons, surely he will bring forward serious agenda items for the government to consider. We are working towards a major nation-building project for this country at a difficult time. The Conservatives have nothing to offer.

**Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is laughable is how these Liberals get up and talk about things they know very little about. Let us talk about the auto sector. What is very clear is that the Canadian auto sector cannot survive at a 5% tariff. These Liberals somehow bungled it into a 25% tariff, and we have had the result of thousands of auto job losses. They have some strange strategy that includes giving EV rebates to American cars from the president who wants to take our entire auto sector. Meanwhile, our economy is actually shrinking as a result of these terrible decisions.

When will they wake up to the fact that their decisions are hurting the Canadian economy?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again, we are hearing the same rhetoric from the Conservatives blaming Canadians for the trade war. The Conservative member for Bowmanville—Oshawa North said that Canadians are having a “hissy fit” over, basically, tariffs, at a time when GM auto workers in his own riding had just lost their jobs. Why are they not able to say that the trade war is because President Trump decided to impose tariffs on the world, including Canada?

We will fight for our auto workers. We have a great auto strategy. Even Premier Ford is in favour of it. We will make sure that we save jobs.

● (1130)

**William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Instead, he has delivered the weakest. Today, Statistics Canada reports that Canada is the only country in the G7 with negative growth. How did this happen? It is because of years of inflationary deficits, high taxes and an exploding bureaucracy. Business has stalled. Capital is leaving. The GDP per capita is flat.

It is time for the Liberals to remove the taxes and red tape holding Canadians back. What are they waiting for?

*Oral Questions*

**Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and to the Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I think we are starting to recognize that the opposition has finally gotten the memo that we may be in the middle of a trade war, in which our closest ally and trade partner has turned its back on us. That is why we are so focused on making sure that we diversify our trade. That is why we are working hard to open markets in China, India, Japan and Australia, where the Prime Minister is visiting right now, as well as places like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

While those members on their side are trying to figure out whether they are having a hissy fit about this or not, we on this side are focused on creating good-paying jobs across Canada.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite promising the fastest-growing economy in the G7, the Prime Minister has delivered the weakest. Today, we are the only country in the G7 with a shrinking economy and young people are paying the price.

The generation that should be building up wealth for the future is instead falling further behind. Personal debt is at an all-time high. Savings are basically non-existent, and millennials are giving up hope. They want to know when the government will create a working economy so that they can have hope for a better future.

**Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again, as I said earlier and as my colleague also said earlier, when one reads a report from Statistics Canada, one should read the whole report.

What we find out in today's report is that for the year 2025, the whole year, economic growth in Canada was plus 1.7%. That makes it the second fastest in the OECD area. On top of that, we created, in absolute terms, more jobs here than in the U.S. No, we are not falling apart.

**Gaétan Malette (Kapusking—Timmins—Mushkegowuk, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, northern Ontario, once prosperous for young Canadians, has become the source of economic anxiety for over 60% of millennials. Chapleau, in my region, a logging, mining and rail town where young Canadians chased opportunity, now stands as an example of the affordability crisis facing our youth. Canada is now the only G7 economy moving backwards.

When will the government let Canadians build, invest and grow again?

**Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague is sincere in his wanting to support the forestry sector. He does try to work with us on occasion in committee.

I really do hope, however, that Conservatives will bring that forward more positively in the House generally, and help us vote in support of an agenda that is trying to modernize and strengthen the forestry sector in Canada. We have announced \$2.5 billion in support so far. We have a transformation task force going on right now. We do want to work with the member. I look forward to continuing to work with all members.

**Hon. Mike Lake (Leduc—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, real leaders take ownership of their mistakes. They learn and they

change. Contrast that with the daily Liberal approach in the House of blame, blame, blame. The fact is that the Prime Minister's signature election promise was to "build the strongest economy in the G7." That exact phrase appeared, word for word, 10 times in the Liberal platform.

Today we learned that Canada has the only shrinking economy in the G7. Our global competitors, faced with the same global challenges, are all doing better. Will someone take some ownership over there and admit that record Liberal spending is crushing the Canadian economy?

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what is very clear, coming out of the last election, less than a year ago, is that Canadians elected a new Prime Minister with a mandate to build a strong and healthy Canada. That is exactly what we are doing. Whether it is budgetary motions or legislative measures, this is exactly what Canadians want, and it is exactly what this caucus continues to deliver. Contrary to what Conservatives like to spread, misinformation, Canada is still the best country in the world to call home.

• (1135)

**Hon. Mike Lake (Leduc—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking of misinformation, let us talk about the Liberal promises in the last election. Ten months ago, Canadians trusted the Liberal Prime Minister when he promised a budget deficit of only \$62 billion. Five months ago, that number ballooned to \$78 billion and, again this month, they added billions more, which is a promise clearly broken. Ten months ago, Canadians trusted the Liberal Prime Minister when he promised "to build the strongest economy in the G7." Today, we have the weakest economy in the G7, and it is actually shrinking, another promise clearly broken.

Why should Canadians believe anything anyone over there has to say now?

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, contrast the Conservatives with the government of the day and the Prime Minister. We believe in Canadians. We are investing in Canada's infrastructure. We are investing in Canadians. All the Conservatives want to do is talk down Canada.

Have I got a news flash for the members opposite: You have a choice. You can either come onside and be a part of team Canada, or continue what you are doing, which is not representing your constituents. It is representing the Conservative Party of Canada. Let us be there for Canadians first.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I would just remind the experienced member to address his questions through the Chair.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon.

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**MARINE TRANSPORTATION**

**Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government has announced a subsidy program for Canadian steel transportation that applies only to rail, not to marine transportation. There was a time, however, when our shipowners moved hundreds of thousands of tons of steel every year.

The lack of equivalent support poses a direct threat to these shipments. Nevertheless, interprovincial marine transportation plays a vital role in supply chains, and Transport Canada's mandate is precisely to promote an integrated transportation system.

Will the minister correct this inconsistency and include national marine transportation in his program?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague. I know that she works very hard on her files. I also know that she represents a riding where marine transportation is very important. I will be happy to look into this issue with her.

Of course, we are also looking for ways to move steel across the country as we develop more major infrastructure projects domestically, and we will be working on that with the Minister of Transport as well. I will be happy to work with my colleague after question period.

**Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, at the Port of Valleyfield in my riding, Desgagnés Logistik Valport stands to lose customers because Transport Canada decided to create unfair competition between rail transportation and marine transportation. The federal government is jeopardizing ports, jobs and entire logistics corridors.

Since the Minister of Transport claims to understand the importance of marine transportation and the hundreds of thousands of tons of steel that depend on it, will he clearly commit to adding national marine transportation to the program with a firm timeline and equitable parameters?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is also well aware that if the company in question is struggling financially, then we can work together to support it through Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, the portfolio I am responsible for.

That said, I will be happy to look into this issue with the Minister of Transport to find a solution that is good for the people of Valleyfield.

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, child poverty in Canada has risen for the third consecutive year. In 2025, nearly 30,000 more children fell below the poverty line, according to the latest child and family poverty report card. The progress our country once made is not just slowing; we are going backwards. Behind every statistic is a child going without, a family stretched beyond its limits and parents forced to make impossible choices.

When will the Liberal government reverse the rise in child poverty, reduce the cost of living and strengthen our economy so Canadians can afford basic necessities?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that same report mentions how our government's investments in the Canada child benefit, in dental care and in child care are helping families lower their cost of living.

I welcome the Conservatives and the question, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about the supports we have in place to help all children. One child in poverty is too many, but that is why we have a Canada child benefit that is tax-free. A majority of the recipients of it are lone-parent families, and 90% are single moms. Those are the kinds of supports that the government is putting in place and enhancing, while the Conservatives continue—

● (1140)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake.

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one in five children under six in Canada is living under poverty due to the government, 2.5 million children are growing up in food-insecure households, and most alarming of all, the number of children in severely food-insecure households doubled between 2019 and 2023. For too many parents, the gap between working hard and making ends meet has become impossible. For too many children, opportunity is being replaced with uncertainty.

At what point will the Liberal government confront the reality families are facing, take meaningful actions to lower costs and rebuild an economy where no child is left behind?

*Oral Questions*

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we should all be outraged about child poverty, but what we actually need are concrete plans. That is why, when the government brings forward plans like the national school food program and like affordable child care, it would be nice to have the support of the members opposite in passing those programs.

Why has it been so difficult for us to have a permanent national school food program in this country? Why do the Conservatives not stand up and support affordable child care that helps families? Why will the Conservatives not stand up and support proudly our Canada groceries and essentials benefit to help families? The Conservatives will not do that. The outrage is unwarranted.

**Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after nearly a decade of Liberal governments, child poverty is rising for the third straight year. Nearly 30,000 more children have fallen below the poverty line, and almost one in five children is now living in poverty. Families are not just struggling; they are falling further behind.

Why, after 10 years of higher taxes, higher deficits and higher inflation, are Canadian children worse off under the current government?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it would be excellent for Canadians to also ask why, after so many years, the Conservatives continue to vote against the very programs that are supporting families in need, the most vulnerable families in our country, and our kids.

Why will they not support a national school food program that we have put in place? It is going to help half a million kids coast to coast. Why will the Conservatives not support making it permanent? Why will they not support affordable child care, which is helping nearly a million kids across this country get early learning and child care? These are the types of programs that support families and support our kids, but somehow the Conservatives will not stand up and support these programs when they get the chance.

**Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the government fails to realize is that people are better off, when they have more money in their pockets, they do not need endless government programs. They have a responsibility to provide for their own families through good jobs, yet we have a cost of living crisis. There are 30,000 more children living in poverty. There are so many food-insecure households in this country. The number has doubled, and now working parents cannot even afford to put food on the table.

How much worse does it have to get before the Liberal government lowers costs, fixes the economy and lets Canadian families keep more of what they earn?

**Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are children living in poverty in this country, and we have an opportunity to fight for them. The government supports the Canada child benefit because it goes to six million kids. There are 3.5 mil-

lion families that get the Canada child benefit, but the Conservatives have never supported it. We support child care. They do not. What about pharmacare, the beginnings of it? That helps families too. We support it. They do not. When it comes to the school food program, the hon. member across the way called it “garbage” a few months ago. Have we forgotten that?

It is a hard time. Let us have the backs of Canadians by pursuing serious agendas, not games.

**Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when are the Liberals going to realize these programs are not working?

I was recently approached by a young mom who told me how hard it has become to feed her children. It was heart-wrenching. I see her face now when I hear that child poverty rose for a third straight year in Canada. Nearly 30,000 more children have fallen below the poverty line.

When will the Liberal government end the trend of child poverty getting worse every year?

**Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is really ironic for the Conservatives to talk down our programs, when they do not even have a plan. Not only that, but they are voting against every solution we are putting forward to ease the burden of families and put more money into the pockets of Canadians: the dental plan, the groceries benefit, affordable child care and the national school food program.

No one really believes the Conservatives are there to protect the most vulnerable. Let us be serious. I invite them to work with us for real solutions.

\* \* \*

● (1145)

**HEALTH**

**Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, cancer can upend lives in an instant. Every Canadian knows someone, be it a friend, a family member or a colleague, who has faced a cancer diagnosis. It is a disease that touches far too many families across our country. Even some members of the House have, sadly, faced that news themselves.

We all understand the importance of prevention and early detection. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health update the House on what the government is doing to strengthen cancer prevention and ensure that more Canadians benefit from early detection?

*Oral Questions*

**Maggie Chi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my mom is a cancer survivor, and I know what it is like when a loved one goes through cancer treatments.

We also know that prevention matters. Up to 40% of cancer cases could be prevented. That is why I am proud that our government announced \$41 million for groundbreaking cancer prevention research. Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and partner organizations, we are supporting 19 teams whose work will save lives, build a healthier Canada and make sure we get to spend more time with our loved ones.

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[Translation]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the face of poverty is changing. Today, it might be a single mother who skips meals so that her children can dress properly and not be singled out at school. School trips have become luxuries. Families are going into debt to ensure that their children are not left behind. This is the result of 11 years of Liberal policies.

Families do not want pity. They do not want more government cheques. They want to be able to provide for their children.

When will the Liberals understand that ideological programs do not work and finally make decisions that will give our children access to a life of plenty?

**Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned ideology, and that is exactly what this is about.

On this side of the House, we firmly believe that the government has a role to play in reducing poverty through social programs. We firmly believe that social programs are important and help improve the lives of families.

The Conservatives want to eliminate them. That would make things much more difficult.

**Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite all these wonderful, virtuous programs, child poverty is on the rise for the third consecutive year. Nearly 30,000 more children have fallen below the poverty line. One in five children under the age of six lives in poverty in Canada. That means that 2.5 million children are part of a family that is facing food insecurity. In Montmorency—Charlevoix, families are struggling to pay their rent and community organizations are overwhelmed.

Why, after so much massive spending and historic deficits, do our children still not have greater access to resources? Why are they still facing food insecurity?

**Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, poverty in general is a problem, of course, and especially poverty that affects children. Food insecurity is extremely important and extremely concerning. That is why we invite all our colleagues to work together to reduce it.

The way to do that is by increasing economic growth to create good jobs that can provide good family incomes. However, if we

cut social programs, we would be shooting ourselves in the foot and it would be much worse.

[English]

**Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Liberal policies have made child poverty worse. The child and family poverty report card shows child poverty rising for a third straight year. Nearly 30,000 more children are falling below the poverty line, and almost one in five children under age six is now living in poverty. The number of children in severely food-insecure households doubled between 2019 and 2023.

When will the Liberal government stop making child poverty worse, start caring about family food affordability and create a working economy so Canadians can afford to live?

**Hon. Jenna Sudds (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and to the Secretary of State (Defence Procurement), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the fact that there is no government in history that has done more to support families across this country.

Whether that is introducing \$10-a-day, affordable, high-quality child care for almost a million families in this country or introducing the national school food program, we have been there for families and we will continue to be.

● (1150)

**Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously, if those programs were working, we would not have so many children living in poverty.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable, so it is unfortunate that child poverty in Canada has risen for the third year in a row. More than 800,000 children in this country are currently living in poverty, and that number has more than doubled since 2020.

When will the Liberal government reverse the trend of child poverty getting worse under its watch and create an economy where Canadians can afford to live?

**Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is very important to know that the challenges many families in Canada face have to be recognized. I was very proud to stand with our very capable Minister of Jobs and Family in Regina several weeks ago to announce \$1.6 billion to help offset day care fees for the people who want to re-enter the economy.

Any day of the week, I will compare our progress on helping families afford the needs of their children to the Conservatives, who have cut and gut many programs in the past.

*Oral Questions*

**Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Clarke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, poverty has risen for children for the third year in a row. Nearly 30,000 more children are falling below the poverty line this year. One in five children under the age of six now lives in poverty. If this does not cause the Liberals to act, I do not know what will.

When will the Liberals finally meaningfully address the affordability crisis, limit their inflationary spending and get rid of all taxes on food?

**Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before I came to this side of the House, I was so excited when the national school food program was put forward. I grew up in a first nations community among many kids who lived below the poverty line. When I go down to my community centre, I watch kids go into our community centre. They get breakfast, they get lunch and they go to school with a full belly.

When I graduated from high school, I was one of very few who graduated from high school. Now we are seeing kids graduate in record numbers in my community. I have no doubt that it is because of the nutritious breakfasts and lunches they get.

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**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the minister continues to deny issues with the software system Cúram, tens of thousands of Canadians have been impacted by the Liberals' botched update. Cases are backlogged, benefits are delayed and seniors are left paying the price. The program, which was set to cost less than \$2 billion, has ended up costing \$5 billion more.

Why do Liberal programs always massively exceed their projected costs, and why are seniors forced to pay the price for Liberal incompetence?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me try to correct some of the member's assertions today. There is no cost overrun on this project. It is in the first phase. The project is on track with respect to modernizing old age security. When this project is complete, as it is now delivering benefits on time and accurately for over 7.7 million seniors, we are going to see that this new modernization is actually there to support Canadians in some of our largest benefit programs for the next generation.

It was entirely necessary, and the Conservatives should know this because there was a 2011 report from public accounts that encouraged them to start doing the work, which they did not.

**Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals refuse to be transparent with Canadians. The Auditor General has reported these cost overruns numerous times. Their attempt at updating an outdated technology has ended up costing Canadians \$5 billion more, three times more than they projected. The bottom line is this: Canadian seniors deserve better than Liberal excuses and denial.

Why is it that Liberals cannot ever deliver on time or on budget?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this modernization project is the largest IT project ever undertaken by the Government of Canada. When it is completed, it is going to finish the necessary modernization of our biggest benefit programs, which millions of Canadians rely on, to deliver billions of benefits over the course of our lives.

This is a 60-year-old program that required updating. It is in progress. It is delivering benefits to over 7.7 million seniors right now, accurately and on time. It is the first phase. We are going to continue to do this work carefully.

• (1155)

**Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the party of cost runs is at it again. This time it is the flawed Cúram system, a \$6.6-billion disaster that has had tens of thousands of seniors hurt by the latest boondoggle from the incompetent Liberal government.

What is the Liberals' response? Their response has been that it is Canadians' fault for too many of them growing older, becoming seniors and flooding the system. Why are seniors being forced to pay the price for continued Liberal incompetence?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the 2011 report of the public accounts committee sounded the alarm on the lack of sustainable funding for renewing IT infrastructure, noting that major funding shortfalls posed a high risk for core programs not being able to support the aging system, but the Conservatives at the time, who were in government, chose to do nothing about it.

Today, these investments are long overdue. The system is in critical need of updating and modernization to move it off of a paper-based, 60-year-old system, so that Canadians can rely on it and benefits can be delivered securely in the years to come.

**Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the party of ArriveCAN is once again trying to deflect from its recent failure on the OAS payment software. Just like with ArriveCAN, Liberals are spending more energy blaming others than actually fixing the problem. Seniors are waiting over six months sometimes to get their OAS.

When will Liberals stop hiding behind their excuses, admit their billion-dollar failure and take action to ensure seniors receive their old age security?

*Oral Questions*

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I take the member's comments very seriously, and 7.7 million seniors are receiving their benefits on time and accurately in a system that is now designed to be more modern, accessible and secure. I would encourage the member, as the minister has said repeatedly, to speak to us if he knows of cases where there is urgent need. We are set up to deal with them in 24 to 48 hours, and we are very happy to do that.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the opposition members like to claim that our country is broken. Not only is that in poor taste, but it is completely untrue, because Canada has everything the world covets: abundant natural resources, a highly skilled workforce and strong, diverse trade agreements. On this side of the House, we believe in Canada, and we believe in our Canadian businesses and workers.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary how this confidence translates into generational investments in the Canadian economy.

**Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very good question.

The reality is that petty slogans are not a plan. On our side of the House, we have a real plan to build a strong and resilient economy. Our plan is yielding results. Private investment already rebounded spectacularly in the fourth quarter. Yesterday, Statistics Canada announced that foreign direct investment has now reached its highest level in 18 years.

Our plan is working. Our plan is serious and it is producing results.

\* \* \*

[English]

**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government's Cúram system is causing delays for hundreds of seniors who depend on OAS and GIS to pay their expenses. These services are vital to seniors on fixed incomes. Four cost overruns were reported by the Auditor General in 2025. Similar incidents persist in every software program they attempt to execute.

When will the Liberal government accept accountability for another software system that has failed, costing taxpayers \$5 billion?

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to try to shed some light on this again for the members opposite. This initiative is a phased program. There is no cost overrun. The modernization of our old age security

systems is necessary. I think all Canadians would understand that 60-year-old computer programs are outdated, obsolete and at risk.

If we want Canadians to have their benefits on time and accurately, as this program is already delivering to over 7.7 million seniors, we need to be modernizing it. We need to be moving to modernize our other systems around EI and CPP as well. This is necessary to support the biggest benefit programs the Government of Canada has.

[Translation]

**Bernard Généreux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Ottawa does not just have a software problem. It has a systemic problem. Every time the Liberals hire a private firm, costs skyrocket and accountability goes out the window. First there were Phoenix and ArriveCAN, and now we have Cúram, which is costing \$6.6 billion. Half of that money is going to consultants, while thousands of seniors are waiting for their pensions.

When will the Liberals admit that the real problem is not just the software but their management approach? Consultants are getting richer while our seniors are getting poorer waiting for their cheques.

● (1200)

[English]

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with great respect to the member opposite, I really would recommend to him the reports of the Auditor General on benefit delivery modernization and the testimony and report of the public accounts committee, both in 2011 and also from this past fall.

We are obviously working to address the outstanding cases, but let us please keep in perspective that this is the single-largest IT modernization project the Government of Canada has ever had, and right now it is delivering accurate and on-time benefits to over 7.7 million seniors.

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**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**John Williamson (Saint John—St. Croix, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, another federal wharf in my riding has been condemned. Many others in New Brunswick need urgent repairs. Federal wharves are the lifeblood of coastal communities, but they are being neglected by the Liberals. Just as inland economies rely on highways and airports to get products to market, Atlantic Canada relies on wharves to export high-quality seafood to the rest of Canada and around the world.

In the last election, the Prime Minister promised an extra \$250 million for federal wharves, but the budget did not include a nickel. Is this another Liberal broken promise?

**Ernie Klassen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, small craft harbours are fixtures of coastal communities and our economy. That is exactly why our government is investing hundreds of millions of dollars into our small craft harbours. We are building the infrastructure that allows our harvesters to do their jobs and support their families and their communities.

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#### FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

**Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, I was proud to stand alongside my colleagues on this side of the House to vote in favour of Bill C-15. In addition to unlocking generational investments to help build a strong, modern, resilient Canadian economy, Bill C-15 contains important measures to make life more affordable for Canadians, including measures to advance open banking.

Can the parliamentary secretary let us know how open banking reforms would allow Canadians to securely share financial data and give consumers clearer choices and better tools to manage their finances?

**Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in her short time as a member of Parliament, the member is making outstanding contributions on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. She is doing great work in the constituency, she brings great experience as a former town councillor, and importantly, as a lawyer, she stood up for women who had been abused in domestic relationships.

The member points to Bill C-15. Of course, its main focus is the economy, but within that bill is a focus also on open banking. The autonomy provided by open banking can help women experiencing violence in relationships. It is another way that we are showing support for people across communities and especially vulnerable populations. We will continue to do that.

\* \* \*

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are failing to stop criminals from stealing our cars. Vehicle identification numbers, or VINs, from exported vehicles are being used to sell stolen cars. The CBSA has a record of these VINs but refuses to share them with Canadian used car dealers, who would use them to identify stolen vehicles. Instead, the government has given an American company a monopoly on this data, charging Canadians \$40 million each year just to get access to our own data. It is absurd.

Why will the Liberals not give Canadians access to our own data so that we can stop car theft?

**Vince Gasparro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear

#### Oral Questions

the hon. member talk about pieces of legislation that are required to catch criminals and put them away.

The fact of the matter is that we have had significant pieces of legislation in front of this House for almost a year. The strong borders act, the combatting hate act, bail reform and intimate partner violence are significant pieces of legislation that the Conservatives have obstructed and prevented from getting passed. Why do you not come over here and join us in catching the criminals?

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I will remind members to direct comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

\* \* \*

#### LABOUR

**Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Jobs and Families said, “Nobody should [be expected to] work for free”, yet this came after the Liberals undermined the CUPE flight attendants' strike against unpaid labour by using section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, siding with their corporate friends.

Last week, this anti-worker stance led to a final settlement that CUPE said was not the outcome the union fought to achieve. Shame.

Will the Liberals finally recognize workers' rights and support my bill to repeal section 107?

• (1205)

**Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we stand firmly in the belief that nobody should work for free in this country. We take any kind of claims of unpaid work very seriously. Workers must be paid for the hours they work.

We are going to make sure that employers are following the rules, and we stood up in terms of the airline industry to make sure that we were doing an investigation into the labour practices of that industry. We are continuing with that investigation right now to get further information to make sure that those practices are in compliance with the Labour Code.

\* \* \*

#### HOUSING

**Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is to the hon. Minister of Housing.

*Routine Proceedings*

British Columbian MPs were stunned when the provincial government killed the B.C. community housing fund. We now have projects that are ready to roll. The land has been purchased, the zoning is completed and the permits are in place for senior, low-income housing and veterans housing on Galiano Island, on Mayne Island, in Saanich and across British Columbia.

Will the federal government step up to create a defined program for shovel-ready projects to make sure that the housing gets built for the people who need it?

**Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear that we need to focus on what we can control. That is why our government announced a new partnership with B.C. that will deliver 1,100 homes across the province, with shovels in the ground in the months to come. This partnership includes 700 supportive and transitional homes.

We are also delivering right now. Just today, the minister is visiting Bob and Michael's Place in B.C., a place that would enable federal funding and that is opening its doors today as it provides 200 supportive homes for the community.

This is an important issue, and we are taking action.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### HEALTH

**Maggie Chi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)”, adopted at Geneva on June 1, 2024.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**John Williamson (Saint John—St. Croix, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following three reports. The fifth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is entitled “Follow-up Study of Gender Based Plus Analysis in the Government of Canada”.

[*English*]

The sixth report is entitled “Arctic Waters Surveillance”, and the seventh report is entitled “Delivering Canada's Future Fighter Jet Capability.”

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these reports.

## PETITIONS

### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Dan Mazier (Riding Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to present a petition on behalf of constituents. I rise for the seventh time on behalf of the people of Dauphin, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. Residents of Dauphin and the Parkland region are demanding that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which have fuelled a surge in crime throughout their communities.

Since 2015, there has been a 54% increase in violent crime and a 75% increase in sexual assaults across Canada. Petitioners are deeply concerned by what they have read in local papers, including a November report that the Dauphin RCMP is searching for a wanted man with three separate arrest warrants.

Our once safe communities have now turned into places where people fear for their lives because the government's catch-and-release policies have allowed violent repeat offenders to be out on bail instead of in jail.

The people of Dauphin and the Parkland region demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which directly threaten their livelihoods and their community. I fully support the good people of Dauphin.

### PAY EQUITY

**Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, I am rising on behalf of 69 petitioners who are seeking attention on pay equity. They have found that the office of the pay equity commissioner reported in 2024 that women earn 87¢ for every dollar earned by men and that this gap is even larger for Black, indigenous and racialized women, and disabled women.

The governments of Yukon, NWT and Nunavut continue to be exempt from the Pay Equity Act. The petitioners point out that the Treasury Board of Canada, as an employer, has a responsibility to establish a pay equity plan. They are calling on the federal government to do three things: to increase the funding for the Office of the Pay Equity Commissioner; to provide more resources; and to issue an order in council removing the exemptions for the three territories from the Pay Equity Act.

• (1210)

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**John Williamson (Saint John—St. Croix, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from Canadians who are concerned about the amendments to Bill C-9 that would put religious leaders and people of faith at risk of political persecution.

Petitioners note that this amendment would make it possible for a religious leader to be jailed for expressing beliefs in religious texts. A member of the government even shared this view, stating that there are passages in the Bible that were “clear hatred” and that there “should perhaps be discretion for prosecutors to press charges.”

The petitioners call on the government to repeal this amendment and to protect freedom of religion for Canadians.

#### FISHERIES

**Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today to again present a petition on behalf of the recreational scallopers in Newfoundland and Labrador to provide for a more inclusive licensing policy. I send a special thanks to Gerald Parrott from Harbour Breton for collecting the names on this petition.

The elderly, physically challenged and disabled want the ability to use a mechanical hauler to retrieve their scallop rakes. These rakes can weigh hundreds of pounds once they have been towed over the bottom for a little while. This petition also calls for commercial scallopers to be allowed to hold a recreational scallop licence.

I look forward to a response from the regional minister for Newfoundland and Labrador that is much better than the nonsense we received from her parliamentary secretary.

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the words “Bill C-9” are words that I think are known well right across this whole nation. I have multiple petitions here today that I will present to the House from the citizens and residents of Canada. The petitioners indicate that they are very concerned about the Liberal-Bloc amendment to Bill C-9 that would be used to criminalize passages from the Bible, which would literally criminalize individual people for sharing and talking about their faith in the scriptures. The state has no place in the religious texts or teachings of any faith community. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights in Canada and they have to be preserved.

Therefore, these individuals are calling on the Liberal Government of Canada to protect religious freedom, not attack it, to uphold the right to read and share sacred texts, and to prevent government overreach into matters of faith.

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#### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

### INDIAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

#### Government Orders

**Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak today as part of the debate on Bill S-2.

Before addressing the bill directly, I would like to start by expressing my sincere solidarity with women. The Bloc Québécois also stands in solidarity with them. I mention women specifically because they are the ones who have been experiencing gender discrimination since 1876. As I said, I would like to express our solidarity and tell them that the Bloc Québécois is fully in favour of passing Bill S-2.

That said, although the Bloc Québécois is in favour of passing the bill, it should be noted that Bill S-2, like others before it—I am thinking of Bills S-3 and C-31—addresses injustices recognized by the Supreme Court, but in an incremental and piecemeal approach. These legislative measures do not really address all the discrimination being experienced by indigenous women and, in this case, their descendants, with regard to the transmission of status.

I will echo the words of the Assembly of First Nations. The second-generation cut-off rule remains a colonial practice and, as such, it is indefensible. It is also arbitrary. The government cannot force a nation to be or not to be what it is. The government cannot tell people that they are indigenous or that they are not. It is not up to the federal government to decide who is a first nations person and who can give or grant status to their children. Simply calling it “granting status” or “giving status” is telling. I think we need to be empathetic when we are talking about Bill S-2 and anything to do with registration entitlements. I would find it difficult for a government I do not even recognize to dictate what I could pass on to my children, such as my identity, my values, my language and my culture.

That is what is at stake every time we come back to the House. I mentioned two bills earlier. For more than 40 years, we have been coming back to the House to say that we need to fix arbitrary, discriminatory provisions, especially when they impact women.

According to Chief Verreault-Paul, despite Bill S-2, the definition remains a colonial definition of first nations people. That is what is we are tackling. We know it is a huge undertaking. I mentioned that it has been more than 40 years, but we have to vote in favour of this bill, this amended bill even. We know that the bill was introduced in the Senate and that the Senate heard from a lot of witnesses who said that the bill was incomplete and that several amendments had to be made to it. We are ready to do that. Discussions have been held and we can go further to address these discriminatory provisions.

### *Government Orders*

The second-generation cut-off breaks up families over rules that could be abolished. We hope to overcome this. The fact is children are being excluded. This deprives thousands of people of their rightful place in their communities. It jeopardizes, and I will come back to this later, the present and future of communities, their language, and their culture.

We hope that Bill S-2 will help put an end to the government's control over indigenous identity. It may not be the only bill that will achieve this. The government always waits until it is pushed to the brink or cornered before making changes to the Indian Act when it comes to registration entitlements.

• (1215)

What is happening today with Bill S-2 is the same thing that has happened before with other bills, namely Bill S-3 and Bill C-31. There are Supreme Court rulings that call upon the government to amend the act to make the unconstitutional provisions constitutional, but such changes always take a really long time and then that becomes an excuse for failing to take action. First, the government is not taking action when it could be doing so. When I say that nothing has been done for 40 years, I am referring to 1985, but I could just as easily say that nothing has been done since 1876. Second, when the government does decide to implement a bill, it takes a really long time and it does not necessarily allocate the resources needed to implement the bill properly.

I would like to continue by talking about the requests made to the Senate committee by the organization Quebec Native Women, which wanted something to be done about the systemic discrimination against women and children. I believe the first amendment they suggested involves doing away with the second-generation cut-off. We agree with that and that is what we are interested in, although I will not say that it is what interests us the most, all things being equal. In this case, there is discrimination. No form of discrimination is any better than another, but this provision affects a huge number of people.

If we take a closer look, we realize that this is really a strategy. The reason I say that there is an underlying intention behind the act and the bill, that a real assimilation strategy is at work, is because this exclusion denies second-generation children their indigenous identity. If we do the math, as the generations go by, the children who are denied indigenous status will no longer be included in the statistics. Obviously we are talking about people here, but I have to talk in terms of numbers. This is just a roundabout way of extinguishing the indigenous identity of children who should be recognized as indigenous. Once again, the government is deciding for them.

Quebec Native Women obviously wants to point out that women have been the primary victims of this kind of discrimination, especially under the exclusion provisions that no longer recognized a woman as indigenous if she divorced or separated from her husband or was widowed. That has been resolved, but now it is the second generation's turn. Through the various amendments or bills that have been passed, the government has simply put its intention—I say “intention” because I believe that the government knows perfectly well what it is doing—to assimilate first nations people on hold.

We could look at the figures for Canada, but Quebec Native Women pointed out that in Quebec, for example, by 2046, 22,445 children will have been excluded. By 2066, 54,745 children will have been excluded under subsection 6(2). What is more, by 2066, 60% of registrants will be registered under subsection 6(2); 60% is huge. We know that these 60% will no longer be eligible for registration. These children will not be eligible for registration. As the representatives of Quebec Native Women said themselves, this rule functions as a demographic countdown. I am reminded of a young woman who appeared before the indigenous affairs committee and spoke about her daughter. The young woman is indigenous, but her daughter's father is not. Her daughter is therefore of mixed parentage and is not considered indigenous, which is absurd.

• (1220)

We keep talking about provisions, the Supreme Court and systemic discrimination, but this example alone clearly shows that some children are being denied the right to be who they are. I could also have mentioned the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The issue was raised there, and it contravenes two articles of the declaration.

I also want to add that one of my Senate colleagues, Michèle Audette, spoke at committee during the study of Bill S-2 and said that the government was making it harder for first nations people to pass on their identity than for other Canadians to pass on citizenship. We can see that there is already a double standard. Indigenous people cannot pass on citizenship in the same way as other Canadian citizens.

I will now talk about transferring authority over first nation membership to first nations. This is the same type of thing. This is another thing that is being called for by Quebec Native Women. As we know, the government has authority over first nations registration, but first nations are asking for that authority to be transferred to them so that they can decide who belongs to their band or community.

This request makes perfect sense to me. We are talking about identity and citizenship. It makes no sense to me for one nation to be responsible for deciding who belongs to another nation. This is something that all stakeholders are calling for, including the Assembly of First Nations and the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador.

This registration rule applies to all communities, except for those covered by section 10, which enables some first nations to use customary law. It basically applies to all first nations in Canada. Once again, I would like to remind the House about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Government of Canada is once again violating article 33 by not giving first nations this authority. This is a clear, direct and overt violation of the right to self-determination. We hope that this authority will be transferred to first nations.

Another issue raised by Quebec Native Women is the right to end the obligation to provide the father's name. Since 1985, if the mother does not identify the father, the department assumes that the child is not eligible for registration. This means that the repercussions affect mothers of unrecognized children covered by subsection 6(2).

Once again, we must refer to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. My colleague Michèle Audette testified about this in committee. Unfortunately, women and girls have suffered a great deal of violence and trauma as a result of these exclusion clauses, which have torn women away from their families and communities. I am talking about women, but this also happened to boys and men. It was decided overnight that they were no longer indigenous, that they no longer had any rights. They were deprived of their culture. They were deprived of their families. They were deprived of their language. They were asked to leave their communities.

Forcing women to identify a child's father does much the same thing. Once again, it was decided that certain children no longer had the right to be indigenous. We are asking that women no longer be required to identify the father.

I mentioned violence, but I could have said rape. Let us call it what it is. Cases of rape occur, and sometimes it is best not to identify the man for safety reasons. In some situations, unfortunately, the father's name is not even known. In any case, for women who are victims of violence, this is a violation of their charter right to security and dignity.

● (1225)

Another issue that was the subject of much debate, and that may also be debated in the House, was the whole question of officially recognizing and redressing the harm caused by the Indian Act. Each reform, whether it is Bill C-31 or Bill S-3, introduced a provision that excluded any possibility of compensation for victims of discrimination, and the same is true of Bill S-2. For women, the impact is much the same: loss of status, exclusion from the community, denial of socio-cultural rights, intergenerational trauma. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples calls for effective redress. Victims are entitled to redress under article 8, paragraph (2)(d).

Quebec Native Women is also asking for an official apology. They want redress, but the government needs to apologize for having systematically discriminated against indigenous women and indigenous peoples since time immemorial and into the present day. As I said, we cannot delude ourselves. Despite everything, whether Bill S-2 is amended or not, systemic discrimination continues to exist.

### *Government Orders*

Before I wrap up, I would like to make a final point because I have a concern that I raised earlier today when I talked about the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. The committee is currently conducting a study that talks about eligibility for registration, but more broadly than Bill S-2 does. I bring this up today, but obviously, the bill has not yet been referred to the committee for study. The fact remains that there is a lot of talk about consultation. There is talk of going on a cross-Canada tour to see if everyone agrees and if there are any other provisions that could be addressed.

Knowing that the bill is expected to come to us soon, I am concerned, as are all members of the committee. There is a deadline. The Supreme Court says that the matter must be resolved by April 26. Time is already short, but now we are hearing about possible consultations. I am afraid that will take too long. I think we also need to be clear, because all the stakeholders have called on us to take action on this. The situation is urgent. I spoke earlier about the year 2046 and then 2066. We see that rights are being extinguished among children, which means that indigenous communities themselves are being threatened. Considering how long consultation and implementation will take, these communities are truly at risk.

Obviously, there is the issue of the government's intentions. Does the government really want to move forward quickly? It can hold more consultations later. No problem there. It can move forward gradually, not too fast, but little by little. That is what it has been doing from the start anyway. First, we should pass the bill with the amendments proposed by the Senate. Then we can go on our tour. Furthermore, we know that thousands of people are still waiting to register. In terms of delays in the department's service standards, thousands of people have not obtained their status within the prescribed time limits. The situation could snowball. More resources are badly needed to address this situation, and more resources are needed for first nations too. The community is about to grow, but services and funding for first nations are already falling short of the mark. This will have to be done properly.

In closing, I would once again like to quote Chief Verreault-Paul and Quebec Native Women. I am using their words as my own. Representatives from Quebec Native Women said the following:

It is only by integrating [the Senate's amendments and their] amendments and providing communities with necessary resources that Canada will be able to definitively end legal assimilation policies and respect its commitments regarding human rights and reconciliation.

Chief Verreault-Paul said that first nations people have the inherent right to define their own people. He urged all members of Parliament to join forces to dismantle the colonial scaffolding of the Indian Act.

● (1230)

To conclude, I would say that the Bloc Québécois obviously agrees with putting an end to all of the federal government's systemic colonial practices, because we alone must decide our own identity.

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the legislation, as proposed, would affect many of the constituents I represent, so I know there is a fairly keen interest in the subject matter. I also know and recognize that this is something that must be indigenous-led. I really appreciated the introduction by our minister earlier this morning. She brings a very strong personal touch to the issue.

The question I have for the member opposite is this. Would she not concur, given the very nature of the subject matter, that we should be going out of our way to ensure we have that feedback from the community, or indigenous people in general? That is why it is important that the legislation have that committee stage process.

• (1235)

*[Translation]*

**Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, we are actually duplicating the work in committee because, when the bill gets to committee, we will be studying this issue and hearing from witnesses, as was done in the Senate.

We are already doing this work as part of another study. I would not say that we are wasting our time. The testimony we are receiving is all relevant and interesting.

I hope that we can include these in the next study so we can hear from as many witnesses as possible. I think the first nations would agree. I am their critic, so I am going to say this very humbly. I am not going to put words in their mouths. However, I can say that we held consultations a long time ago and that we have known what to do for a long time. Now we need to act.

*[English]*

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

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

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

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, we ask that it be carried on division.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed

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

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

**Hon. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unani-

mous consent to call it 1:30 p.m. so we could begin private members' hour.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

*[Translation]*

### CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House resumed from November 18, 2025, consideration of the motion that Bill C-221, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (disclosure of information to victims), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will be voting in favour of Bill C-221.

The bill seeks to better inform victims about decisions made by the Parole Board of Canada and the Correctional Service of Canada. This measure will not change the whole game for victims and their loved ones, but it would nevertheless allow for greater transparency. It could answer some of the questions raised by victims, who are too often kept in the dark about decisions regarding offenders.

All parties had previously supported Bill C-320 during the last Parliament. It was a mirror bill, so to speak. However, it suffered the same fate as most opposition bills when it died in the Senate.

Bill C-221 seeks to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to keep victims better informed regarding eligibility dates and review dates applicable to the offender in respect of temporary absences, releases or parole.

The bill is rather short, amending four subparagraphs of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. These subparagraphs in the existing act already seeks to inform victims about the offender's eligibility dates and review dates applicable in respect of temporary absences or parole; the date of an offender's release; eligibility dates and review dates applicable in respect of unescorted temporary absences or parole; and the date of such escorted or unescorted temporary absences, parole or statutory release.

The bill would therefore simply add a requirement for Correctional Service Canada to explain how the dates were determined. Section 26 and section 142 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act already provide for certain information to be disclosed to victims and their loved ones at the victim's request. The act also allows victims to register with Correctional Service Canada or the Parole Board to obtain information about the offender.

Here is the information that can be obtained under section 26:

- (i) the offender's name,
- (ii) the offence of which the offender was convicted and the court that convicted the offender,
- (iii) the date of commencement and length of the sentence that the offender is serving, and
- (iv) eligibility dates and review dates applicable to the offender under this Act in respect of temporary absences or parole;

The Parole Board may also disclose the following information if it is determined that such disclosure would not have a negative impact on the safety of the public:

- (i) the date, if any, on which the offender is to be released on temporary absence, work release, parole or statutory release,
- (ii) the conditions attached to the offender's temporary absence, work release, parole or statutory release,
- (iii)...whether the offender will be in the vicinity of the victim...

Paragraphs 142(1)(a) and 142(1)(b) of the act essentially contain the same information under the heading "Disclosure of Information" in the part called "Conditional Release, Detention and Long-term Supervision". This information therefore already includes the dates of release and absences, but no explanation as to how those dates are determined.

In some cases, it is quite simple. Statutory release, for example, usually occurs after two-thirds of the sentence has been served, with exemptions contained in the legislation. Explaining the date would therefore potentially amount to simply explaining the law and how the date was determined under the law.

In other cases, the situation may be more complex. Take, for example, a man serving a life sentence who is given a one-hour escorted absence to attend his mother's funeral. In this case, the victim would need to be given the dates but also told how the date was determined. For example, the Correctional Service of Canada and the Parole Board could explain that it was determined that the offender could be granted an escorted temporary absence of 45 minutes, which they would consider sufficient to cover the funeral service, and then be escorted back to prison.

Explaining how the dates were determined would help victims understand and hopefully alleviate some of their fears. Victims and victims' families often find it difficult to get answers about the release of inmates. The Bloc Québécois does not understand why it is so hard for victims to get answers about the release of inmates, especially when they are abusers, rapists or murderers. Victims and their loved ones already have access to the offender's eligibility dates and review dates, and other information about the offender's release.

• (1240)

Although its intent is commendable, the bill still raises some questions. Will the explanations be technical and concise, or will they be adapted to victims and their loved ones?

For example, the law is complex, not to mention the law, especially if information is not conveyed to victims in an appropriate way, considering that most of them have no legal training. We must therefore ensure that information is properly conveyed to victims in an appropriate format.

### *Private Members' Business*

Then there is the fact that, under the existing act and under Bill C-221, victims have to request information. The victim has to register first with the Correctional Service or the Parole Board, instead of receiving information automatically, which leads us to believe that some victims may not be fully aware of their rights.

The Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes proposes that the National Office for Victims contact victims or their loved ones as soon as a federal sentence is handed down to inform them of their rights and the resources available.

In conclusion, we know that all of the parties supported the mirror bill, Bill C-320, during the last Parliament. I seen no reason why we would not do the same for Bill C-221.

[English]

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about a private member's bill sponsored by my good friend and colleague, the member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies.

It is a great piece of legislation that will amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act with a focus on victims. It is a simple bill that will have a significant and positive impact on our justice system. Unlike other criminal bills, this one does not create a new crime or further define an existing crime. It does not create new penalties for something that already is illegal. It will have no impact on people who have been convicted of a crime and who are incarcerated. However, it will have a very big and positive impact on victims of crime.

At the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, when I served on that committee in the last Parliament, we conducted a study on victims of crime. We learned from many victims and their families that, from their perspective, Canada's criminal justice system feels more like a criminal system than a justice system. That is because the focus is on the criminal: Are they guilty? Do we have enough evidence to convict them in a court beyond a reasonable doubt? What would be the appropriate sentence if they are found guilty, or the appropriate release conditions?

Underlying all of this, of course, is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the legal right everybody has to be presumed innocent. That is all important stuff and nobody is arguing about that. We want a criminal justice system that is fair, balanced and in compliance with our charter, but in all of that, where are the innocent victims whose lives have been upended by the terrible acts of the convicted criminal?

Too often the lives of the victims are a sideshow in our criminal justice system. They need to be more front and centre. We want justice after all, not just for the criminal and not just to put people away for public safety or for punishment. We want a true sense of justice for the innocent, so that they too feel that the justice system is working for them.

*Private Members' Business*

That is why I am so pleased that my colleague, the member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, brought forward this private member's bill to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act focusing on victims. In his speech in this chamber a couple of months ago when this bill was first introduced, he shared a personal story about how a crime committed many years ago impacted him and his family, and to this day the impact is still felt. It never goes away.

I am also very pleased that another colleague, the member for Oshawa, has seconded the bill. She too has a connection with this piece of legislation, because it was her predecessor, a member of Parliament, our friend and former colleague Colin Carrie, who introduced a similar private member's bill in the last Parliament. It was called Bill C-320.

At that time, all the parties agreed it should go ahead and it almost made it over the finish line. It went through the first, second and third readings here. Then it went to the other place for the first and second readings. It then went to committee for third reading. The only thing that was left to do was royal proclamation. What happened to it? It died on the Order Paper when Prime Minister Trudeau prorogued Parliament early last year for the sole purpose of rescuing his faltering Liberal Party from falling over the cliff. I will have more on that some other day, because that is not what we are talking about today.

We are now here in the 45th Parliament and again it appears we have all-party support for this common-sense Conservative bill that is going to have a real and positive impact on victims and their families.

In preparing my talking points for my intervention today, I took the opportunity to read the speeches published in the Hansard that were delivered by other members of other parties. It looks like the Bloc Québécois will support it. That is great. We know the Liberals will support it. As a matter of fact, they like the bill so much that they have adopted the substance of it and have incorporated it into one of their bills, Bill C-16, which is a very large criminal justice bill that runs 166 pages. It is at the justice committee right now undergoing a very thorough review. It may come back here, but in the meantime, we are going to keep pushing my colleague's private member's bill.

● (1245)

As an aside, I am feeling positive. We are seeing a lot of stealing of ideas in the current Parliament, with the Liberals adopting Conservative proposals and calling them their own, proposals that just a short while ago they were criticizing and scoffing at. Now I guess they have finally seen the light. Imitation is the highest form of admiration. I can tell members that it feels really good to be admired by the Liberal side of the House for a change. We do not get a lot of that.

However, I do not want to make too much of this recent and probably very temporary sense of goodwill. The chamber is a very adversarial one after all. Let us just settle on this. This is good legislation, and we should push it through as quickly as we can.

I am well into my speech and I realize I have not even said what the bill would do. I can do no better than to summarize with a sen-

tence from the speech I referenced earlier from my friend, the member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies. He said this on November 18, 2025: “Transparency and accountability are core principles of our democracy, and the bill we debate today seeks to enhance the application of these essential principles, specifically for the benefit of those victimized by crime.” This is a really good summary.

What would the bill do? It seeks to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to ensure that victims receive clear explanations about how an offender's eligibility and review dates for temporary absences, release or parole are determined. Victims and their families would be told not only when those dates will be but also the rationale behind why those dates have been chosen, because we believe transparency and accountability are core principles of our democracy.

We have heard from victims of crime that Canada's criminal justice system feels deliberately opaque. They feel left in the dark. It does not have to be that way. We can do better. The bill is a small step in that direction. Let us expedite it through the House and the other place, and push Canada's criminal justice system another small step towards true justice for everyone, including victims of crime.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-221. This bill would ensure that victims of crime are informed about the offender's parole eligibility dates, including an explanation of how those dates were determined. The bill would require the Correctional Service of Canada and the Parole Board of Canada to explain to victims how parole eligibility, review and release dates are determined.

This bill is consistent with our government's commitment to supporting victims of crime and their families. We believe that disclosing information to victims shows transparency and that their right to information about the people who harmed them must be respected at all stages of the correctional and parole process. More broadly, the proposed amendments are in keeping with our government's overall approach of putting victims' best interests at the heart of our justice system.

Moreover, our government's Bill C-16 has the same objectives as the private member's bill we are considering today, namely to broaden the scope of the information available to victims, strengthen their right to receive clear explanations, and ensure their impact statements are taken into account not only at sentencing, but also when decisions regarding parole or corrections are made.

*Private Members' Business*

However, the methodologies are different. Rather than repeating the same explanation requirement in several separate disclosure provisions, our Bill C-16 establishes a single, clear rule. This rule states that any disclosure to victims regarding release or eligibility for parole must include an explanation of how the applicable dates were determined. This approach applies consistently to all disclosures, reduces repetition in the law and limits the risk of inconsistencies.

The amendment broadening the scope of the information available to victims is part of one of the most significant updates to the Criminal Code in generations, which the government has undertaken with Bill C-16. This reform aims to respond to modern threats, protect victims of domestic violence, defend our children and strengthen victims' rights.

To strengthen our response to intimate partner violence, we have proposed several legislative amendments in Bill C-16. We will create a new offence to prohibit coercive or controlling behaviour toward an intimate partner. The goal is to give the justice system the tools it needs to intervene before violence escalates. We know that abuse often stems from controlling behaviours long before physical violence occurs. We must therefore criminalize coercive control in order to facilitate early intervention before intimate partner violence escalates or, in some cases, becomes fatal.

"Coercive behaviour" refers to a combination or repetition of three types of behaviour: violent behaviour, coercive sexual behaviour, or behaviour that could reasonably lead a victim to believe that their physical or psychological safety is threatened. For this last category, a non-exhaustive list of problematic behaviours will be developed based on the experiences of survivors. Their testimonies will help us better understand the subtle means used by abusers to exert control over their intimate partners.

Bill C-16 also seeks to make it easier to prove criminal harassment. Currently, this offence requires the prosecution to prove that the victim feared for their safety, which often involves the victim having to testify. This puts victims in a situation where they are forced to relive traumatic events. We therefore propose replacing the requirement that the victim fear for their safety with an objective requirement, namely, whether a reasonable person in similar circumstances would have had such fears. That is an important distinction. It allows the prosecution to establish that criminal harassment has occurred without requiring the victim to testify.

We will also ensure that criminal harassment offences expressly include harassing behaviour committed using modern technologies. With the technological advances made in recent years, a growing number of troubling situations have come to light, specifically with respect to electronic surveillance. Victims must be fully protected from harassment committed by these means. Bill C-16 also allows us to take action in this area.

Another major improvement is that murders committed in situations of control, hate, violence or sexual exploitation will be processed as first-degree murders, even in the absence of premeditation or deliberation. This is important because first-degree murder is the most serious type of homicide under the Criminal Code.

• (1255)

With these changes, femicide committed in the context of domestic violence will be treated as first-degree murder. This is a major step forward. This is important because it addresses a problem we are facing in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, women continue to account for a disproportionate number of homicide victims at the hands of an intimate partner. In 2024, according to Statistics Canada figures, nearly one in six homicide victims in Canada was killed by a spouse or intimate partner. We cannot tolerate this type of crime in our country, and we need to crack down on those who perpetrate it.

We will also tackle deepfakes. The Criminal Code already prohibits the distribution of intimate images without the individual's consent. However, this offence does not apply to sexually explicit deepfakes. As we know, with the rise of artificial intelligence, it is becoming increasingly easy to create fake images that look like real images. When these are shared, it can have devastating consequences for the people involved. As a government, we need to better protect victims against these new threats, which are based on recently developed technologies.

Another issue is that the Criminal Code currently does not have provisions against making threats to share intimate images. As I mentioned, it is a crime to share an intimate image without the consent of the person depicted, but there is no section in the Criminal Code on threatening to do so. This means that victims are less protected, especially those who are being blackmailed under the threat that intimate images or sexually explicit images will be released if the victim does not comply with the requirements of the person making the threat. We need to protect victims from this type of threat, and we will do so because it is unacceptable. This will apply to the threat of sharing real images as well as sharing deepfakes created using artificial intelligence.

Together, these reforms will help create a justice system that is quicker and earlier to act and offers stronger protection to those facing domestic violence and sexual violence, all while keeping our children safe. As legislators, we must ensure that the best interests of victims are at the heart of our justice system, and that is what we are doing through this ambitious Criminal Code reform, as set out in Bill C-16.

*Private Members' Business*

I would like to mention that this reform is part of a series of bold and decisive public safety measures that our new government has put in place since taking office. With Bill C-14, we will make our bail laws stricter and impose tougher sentences for repeat and violent offenders. This bill proposes over 80 targeted amendments to the Criminal Code. These changes make it more difficult to get bail, particularly for repeat and violent offences, and ensure that those who commit serious crimes face real consequences. That is what Canadians expect of us. We have listened and we are acting on what we have heard.

What is more, Bill C-12 seeks to strengthen security at our borders. We are making crucial changes to give law enforcement and border security the tools and resources they need to disrupt the activities of increasingly sophisticated criminal groups, including those involved in fentanyl and weapons trafficking.

We also made investments in public safety in budget 2025, specifically to hire more RCMP and border services officers. We also invested in prevention and mental health services in order to be proactive about preventing crime before it is committed. The safety of our communities is an issue that we, on this side of the House, take very seriously.

I hope we can count on the co-operation of our opposition colleagues to support us in passing our various bills on fighting crime and protecting victims, namely Bills C-16, C-14 and C-12, as well as all of the measures we are proposing in the House to make our communities safer. It is in that same spirit of co-operation that we will be supporting the private member's bill before us today.

We understand that keeping Canadians safe and protecting victims of crime must transcend party lines and should be a concern for all of us. On our side of the House, we understand that safe and resilient communities are the backbone of a strong Canada. They attract people, families, businesses and investment, and promote security and prosperity. We must take action to keep our communities safe and help protect victims of crime.

• (1300)

[English]

**Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to this private members' bill presented by my colleague, the member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, Bill C-221, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act regarding the disclosure of information to victims. The bill seeks to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to ensure that victims receive clear explanations about how an offender's eligibility and review dates for temporary absences, release and parole are determined.

Every Canadian has the right to feel safe in their community, and I am proud to be a member of a party that values a justice system that serves victims of crime. It follows that if an offender is being released, victims deserve to have an understanding of the decisions leading to the release of the offender and a transparent and accountable explanation of how the decision was reached.

This amendment to the law would ensure that victims would know when offenders could be released, and would then be provided the reasons for why officials determined those eligibility dates.

The contents of this bill are not new. Conservatives have proposed this amendment dating back to the 42nd Parliament. It is such a sensible amendment that it has received widespread support from all sides of this chamber.

Every one of us knows someone who has been a crime victim, unfortunately. The impacts are felt far beyond the individual, to a family, loved ones and eventually, to every community.

Respect for victims should be the standard, not the exception. In order to truly support victims, our legislation has prioritized their rights and well-being. This means giving victims a chance to prepare themselves and understand the rationale that led to the release of the criminal who abused or harmed them or one of their loved ones. This transparency has absolutely no downside at all.

We have witnessed an alarming trend with the current government that all too often, the rights of victims are overshadowed by the rights of offenders. That has to change in this country.

I will give a statistic. In my city of Saskatoon, crime rates, unfortunately, are climbing. From January 2025 to January 2026, violent crime in my city, unfortunately, is up by 13%, and property crimes in the city of Saskatoon are up year to year by 16.5%.

Over 10 years, the Liberal government has paid little or even no attention to victims in this country. I have gone on numerous ride-alongs with police and paramedics in my city. Each ride-along brings new experiences. There are so many repeat offenders that police know the criminals by name. They pick them up on a Monday afternoon, and they are released later in the day.

Two weeks ago, the release of a Saskatoon man with 70 prior convictions of voyeurism, indecent acts and trespassing at night sent shockwaves through a city of over 300,000. Kyle Hameluck was rearrested just hours after being released and was found to be breaching the conditions of his release.

*Private Members' Business*

I have received emails from constituents with grave concerns. In fact, I even had one who was victimized in my riding by Hameluck. It is understandable that she is horrified that this man was allowed out after an incredible 70 prior convictions. Victims should not have to relive their nightmares. He had 70 convictions, yet he was released, only to be found breaching the conditions of his release less than 24 hours later.

• (1305)

A known offender was set free to terrorize a community all over again, and it did not take him long to find new victims. Thankfully he is again behind bars, and I sincerely hope that when he is sentenced, his victims will one day be given the courtesy of knowing how his release was decided.

A truly just system protects its own citizens. Many victims are left in the dark when it comes to parole decisions. They deserve an explanation of how parole dates are determined. The amendment would benefit victims of crime by making the justice system in this country more transparent. Bill C-221 would stand up for the rights of victims to understand exactly how parole dates and eligibility are set for offenders.

I am proud to support the bill. This has been in the House previously. In fact, this is the fourth time the bill has been introduced in this place. It was introduced in the 42nd, 43rd and 44th parliaments, and now the Liberals are rumbling that they are going to include this in Bill C-16.

It is time to get this bill over the line to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to ensure that victims receive clear explanation about how an offender's eligibility and review dates are determined. The bill is just one small yet very consequential change which would demonstrate a measure of respect that victims deserve from our justice system in this country. Therefore it is my pleasure to lend my total support to my colleague and his private member's bill, Bill C-221.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** The hon. member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies for his right of reply.

**Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all members who spoke to the bill today and those who spoke during the first hour of second reading on November 18, 2025. Their contributions and support are sincerely appreciated, not just by me but by all victims of crime and those who have worked on this bill.

When Canadians are victimized by crime, they often carry psychological and emotional burdens for life. This private member's bill proposes common-sense, realistic measures aimed at reducing the stress victims experience in dealing with the parole and release process of those who have victimized them. The legislation before us today deserves to be passed because it would deliver relief for victims of crime. It would lighten the burdens they carry by providing them explanations about how parole and release dates have been calculated in relation to the offenders who victimized them.

Debates of this bill, and of a previous bill that proposed the same measures, have reflected how these measures are supported by victims of crime and those who support them and advocate for their

rights. As I have articulated in previous debates, the proposals in this bill were brought to Parliament by Lisa Freeman of Oshawa, Ontario.

Ms. Freeman's personal experience of losing her father and spending years navigating Canada's corrections and parole systems in dealing with her father's killer were excruciating for her. When the burden of losing her father to a violent murderer was compounded by the frustration of dealing with government bureaucracies, Lisa resolved to advocate for legislative measures to alleviate the burdens and frustrations that victims of crime carry.

I send my heartfelt thanks to Lisa Freeman. I thank Lisa for her courage, her determination and the hard work that has moved this legislation forward.

The proposals of this private member's bill have been introduced in four consecutive Parliaments, spanning six and a half years. I also thank those who have worked with Ms. Freeman in previous Parliaments to move those proposals forward. I would like to thank the Hon. Lisa Raitt, who tabled Bill C-466 in the 42nd Parliament; Senator Boisvenu, who tabled Bill S-219 in the 43rd Parliament; and Dr. Colin Carrie, who tabled Bill C-320 in the 44th Parliament. I thank them all for their efforts to improve Canadian law.

It is good to see that the government has formally acknowledged the merit and necessity of the bill's proposals and included them in the government's bill, Bill C-16. These measures supporting victims of crime need to be passed as soon as possible. Canadians count on parliamentarians to make Parliament work, and I invite all parliamentarians to join me in moving my private member's bill toward completion, because the outcome of Bill C-16 remains uncertain in a minority government and these changes are worth pursuing through all possible avenues.

These measures could have and should have been passed years ago, and they were very close to being passed just over a year ago. Clause 205 of the government's bill, Bill C-16, contains coordinating amendments that anticipate the possibility of my bill passing before Bill C-16 does. I appreciate the government acknowledging this possibility and drafting those coordinating amendments in the event that my bill passes before the government's bill does.

Now is the time for us, as legislators, to do our part and pass these amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the changes that Lisa Freeman and other victims of crime deserve. I ask all parliamentarians to support victims of crime across Canada by swiftly passing Bill C-221.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1310)

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

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

• (1315)

**Mel Arnold:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the bill be passed with the support of all parties.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

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

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater):** It being 1:15 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 9, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:15 p.m.)

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