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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

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

Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, entitled “Workers in the Seasonal Industry and the Employment Insurance Program”.

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

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives respectfully submit a dissenting opinion on this report, highlighting the importance of not increasing EI premiums. At this time of high unemployment, especially high youth unemployment, our view is that we need to ensure that payroll taxes, which make it more difficult for businesses to create jobs, do not go up.

The government needs to clarify its position as to whether it stands with us in opposing payroll tax increases or whether it plans to further increase the taxes on job creation.

SILVER ALERT NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ACT

Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-263, An Act to establish a national framework for silver alerts.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce my first private member's bill, the silver alert national framework bill.

The bill is inspired by a tragedy in my community. Over two years ago, Earl Moberg, a beloved husband, father and grandfather living with dementia, went missing from his Winnipeg home in the winter of 2023. Despite extensive search efforts, he was never found and is presumed deceased.

When a vulnerable senior goes missing, every minute matters. By 2030, nearly one million Canadians are expected to be living with dementia, and the risk of serious injury or death rises dramatically if someone is not found quickly. Canada already has the infrastructure to issue rapid geotargeted emergency alerts, but we lack a coordinated national framework for silver alerts.

The bill would require the federal government to work with provinces and police to establish that framework so communities can be alerted quickly and more families would have the chance to bring their loved ones home safely.

I hope that all members of the House will support this important bill, and I encourage all Canadians who do to contact their local MP and urge them to support it.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

JURY DUTY APPRECIATION WEEK ACT

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): moved that Bill S-226, An Act respecting Jury Duty Appreciation Week, be read the first time.

She said: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I cannot express how meaningful this moment is for me. Having practised as a lawyer, and now speaking to one of the fundamental aspects of the criminal justice system, I am deeply moved to stand here today for Bill S-226, an act respecting jury duty appreciation week.

Routine Proceedings

This incredible bill was first sponsored in the Senate by the hon. Senator Lucie Moncion. Thanks to her tireless efforts over the last few years, it passed third reading on February 10 of this year. Thus, I am able to sponsor Bill S-226 today in the House of Commons.

The bill would designate the second week of May each year as jury duty appreciation week across Canada. This week of appreciation is necessary not only to raise awareness but also to recognize and celebrate the people who serve on juries. Often vicarious trauma among them has been neglected. There are concerns about insufficient mental health supports being provided to them. There are also financial barriers, such as lost wages, not being adequately compensated for travel, child care and so forth. These financial impediments are also sacrifices they make.

This time of jury appreciation week is absolutely necessary across Canada. I have briefly outlined these important points that will bring a clearer understanding of what the bill means.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

● (1005)

PETITIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to present a petition about an issue my constituents are concerned about, but the issue is actually on the other side of the country and relates to a proposed project that will affect the Tantramar marsh that is on the Chignecto Isthmus. For those who are not familiar with the Chignecto Isthmus, it is the very low-lying land mass that connects the rest of Nova Scotia to the mainland of Canada. It is under extreme threat from climate change.

Since the 1980s, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identified that this area was particularly vulnerable to sea level rise. In other words, we could lose Nova Scotia's connection by land to the rest of Canada, which would have a multi-billion-dollar impact for sure.

The petitioners note that there is currently a project that is moving toward federal approval for the Centre Village, New Brunswick, gas plant under the company's name, Proenergy, the RIGS project. Given the significance of this area, in terms of both its biodiversity and its critical importance to Nova Scotia and all of Canada, the petitioners are calling for a full independent environmental and climate impact assessment under the Impact Assessment Act, and for the designation of the Chignecto Isthmus, including the Tantramar marsh, as a federally protected area. They are also looking for enforcement of all the laws that protect the biodiversity and the ecosystems of this area.

Members will remember Bill Casey, who used to be the member of Parliament for that area. He raised this issue frequently as well.

JEWISH REFUGEES

Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present in the House today a petition signed by 1,058 Canadians, related to a very sad chapter in Canadian history. Members will remember that about eight years ago, our former prime minister Justin Trudeau rose in the House to apologize for

the treatment of Jewish refugees in the Second World War, including the refusal for the MS *St. Louis* to dock in Canada, sending 900 Jews back into Nazi-occupied Europe. They were fortunately given refuge, but with the start of the Second World War, many of them were actually killed.

The petition relates to Jewish refugees who were sent here from the U.K. who were actually interned, some of them alongside Nazis, for up to three years during the war. The petition asks for us not only to educate Canadians as to this and for the government to devote money to education but also to install proper commemorative plaques at all the nine different sites where Jewish refugees were interned for up to three years, and to do outreach programs to high schools, etc.

At a time of rising anti-Semitism, this is a very important initiative, and I will work with them to do this.

JUSTICE

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling two petitions.

First, I am pleased to present a petition signed by the great law-abiding, family-loving property owners of my riding of Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke. The law-abiding petitioners are calling on the Liberal government to immediately amend section 35 of the Criminal Code of Canada to enshrine the fundamental right to the inviolability of one's home, also called the castle doctrine, for all Canadians.

● (1010)

FALUN GONG

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition, presented by the freedom-loving residents of the great Conservative riding of Markham—Unionville, who up until recently have been left without a proper voice to raise this serious issue in the House.

The petitioners are calling on the government to immediately denounce the CCP's persecution of Falun Gong, oppose sanctions against the CCP and take stronger measures to protect practitioners in Canada and around the world and against CCP's brutal global campaign to silence and ultimately eradicate Falun Gong.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, petitioners in Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford are concerned about Bill C-9, which would amend the Criminal Code to address hate propaganda and hate crimes. The Liberals are proposing an amendment to remove the religious exemption from the Criminal Code that protects good faith expressions of beliefs based on religious texts.

Therefore, the petitioners and permanent residents of Canada call upon the Government of Canada to reject any amendment to Bill C-9 that would remove the religious exemption from Canada's hate speech provisions, to protect Canada's constitutional rights to freedom of religion and expression and ensure that legislation does not criminalize good faith, religious discourse or teaching.

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions.

First I rise in support of the Conservative petition regarding the flawed amendments the Bloc and Liberals are proposing to Bill C-9. If passed, they would put religious freedoms of Canadians in jeopardy.

The residents of Abbotsford—South Langley have voiced their concerns regarding the development of how this may restrict their freedoms. Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms clearly states in sections 2(a) and 2(b) that freedom of expression and freedom of religion must be preserved and are crucial to Canadian society.

Therefore, the petitioners call on the government to protect religious freedoms and uphold the right to read and share sacred texts.

SALMON FISHERY

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition, which I am tabling on behalf of the good citizens of Abbotsford—South Langley who are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to the salmon allocation policy that would decimate regular recreational fishing opportunities for coho and chinook in British Columbia.

Constituents are calling for the Minister of Fisheries to leave the current salmon allocation policy alone to uphold the cultural rights and traditions of all British Columbians.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the petition I am presenting today, petitioners are recognizing that the Government of Canada intends to expand medical assistance in dying to individuals whose only medical condition is mental illness. Mental illness is treatable, recovery is possible and experts agree that it is currently impossible to predict when a mental illness is truly irremediable.

Expanding MAID in this way risks suggesting that some lives are beyond saving, while many Canadians still struggle to access timely and effective mental health care. The petitioners say that families and communities are concerned that people who would recover through treatment and support may instead lose their life, and they are asking the Government of Canada to pass Bill C-218 to stop the expansion of MAID to people whose sole underlying condition is mental illness.

I support the petitioners.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise on behalf of concerned Canadians in my riding of Elgin—St. Thomas—London South and across the country who are registering their incredible frustration and concern with Liberal Bill C-9 and its erosion of freedom of expression and freedom of religion, specifically with the Liberal-Bloc amendment to remove long-standing protections for religious speech.

Routine Proceedings

Petitioners are very much calling on the Liberal government to withdraw this divisive and toxic bill; to state firmly that it will always stand up for religious freedom, including the right to read and share sacred texts; and to prevent government overreach into matters of faith.

I hope the Minister of Justice, who is in the chamber, takes heed of these concerns, which have been coming in by the tens of thousands. I submit them herewith.

FARMLAND IN CLEARVIEW TOWNSHIP

Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the great people in Clearview Township in Simcoe—Grey. We are very supportive of our military. In fact, Base Borden is located within my riding, but the concern is over the site and location of a phase one, over-the-horizon radar system that is right beside the Minessing Wetlands and is also prime agricultural land.

The residents are concerned with the purchase of the first site, which is 750 acres. The second site is up to 3,000 acres. The landowners are not interested in selling around that area. They are pushing for other locations that we feel could be better, not only for the residents but also for the military itself. It is a very busy area.

I present this petition on behalf of the petitioners and their concerns that it is prime farmland that is going to be gone. We talk all the time in the House about food security, so there are other locations that, we stress, would be a lot better.

● (1015)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the people of Richmond Hill South and tens of thousands of petitioners who signed this petition who are concerned about Iranian regime-linked harassment and intimidation occurring on Canadian soil, endangering Canadians of Iranian heritage and of all backgrounds.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada to expand and rigorously enforce targeted sanctions against leaders and enemies responsible for repression; fully implement the IRGC listing through investigations, asset freezes, seizures and prosecutions where warranted, and strengthen immigration and inadmissibility screening to prevent entry by regime officials and their affiliates and family members; direct federal law enforcement and security agencies to investigate foreign interference, transnational repression and money laundering linked to the regime in Iran and to protect Canadians from intimidation; ensure that the foreign influence transparency and accountability regime in Canada includes meaningful penalties and strong enforcement; swiftly implement a robust foreign agent registry to keep Canadians safe; work with international partners to pursue independent investigations and accountability for the mass killings and abuses during the January 2026 crackdowns; and, finally, expel and remove from Canada individuals acting as agents of the regime in Iran.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the thousands of Canadians who have called in to MPs' offices in regard to Bill C-9.

Bill C-9 would amend the Criminal Code to address hate propaganda and hate crimes, but the Liberals are proposing an amendment to remove the religious exemption that protects good-faith expression of beliefs based on religious texts. Removing this exemption would criminalize Canadians for expressing sincerely held religious beliefs, undermining freedoms guaranteed by the charter. This change could lead to legal action against clergy, educators and individuals for quoting or teaching from sacred texts without malice.

Therefore, the undersigned citizens and permanent residents of Canada call upon the Government of Canada to reject any amendments to Bill C-9 that would remove the religious exemption from Canada's hate speech provisions, protect Canadians' constitutional rights to freedom of religion, and express and ensure that legislation does not criminalize good-faith religious discourse or teaching.

ARMS EXPORTS

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to table a petition from my constituents in Winnipeg Centre, who are expressing their concern with the government's ongoing violation of international law by its refusal to close the loopholes in Canada for weapons exports that enable Canadian-made arms to be used for war crimes and genocide. My constituents call on the government to close this loophole by voting in favour of Bill C-233, the no more loopholes act, which MPs will vote on this week.

I will always support my constituents in upholding international law, which is why I encourage all members in the House to say yes to Bill C-233. I join my constituents in demanding that the Liberal government do the same.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who would like to see Bill C-9 withdrawn.

Given the atrocious record of this Liberal government in overstepping its bounds, given the Emergency Act and freezing bank accounts, these Canadians are asking what exactly is preventing this government from expanding its powers under the bill, just to squash dissent. Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Liberal government to withdraw Bill C-9.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today on behalf of the citizens of Cambridge, who are asking that Bill C-9 be withdrawn to protect religious freedoms, uphold the right to read and share sacred texts and prevent government intrusion into their faith.

Kurt Holman (London—Fanshawe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the people of London—Fanshawe and the many Canadians who are concerned about Bill C-9.

Canadians are concerned with regard to the amendments to Bill C-9, which could be used to criminalize passages from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and other sacred texts. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that must be preserved.

● (1020)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 354 different Muslim organizations have signed a letter underlining their opposition to Bill C-9. They note that Bill C-9, as currently drafted, would present serious harms to the civil liberties of Canadian Muslims and Canadians who are raising their voices about human rights.

As I table this petition highlighting the opposition of petitioners to Bill C-9, it is important for the government to understand and not misstate the strong opposition from many different communities. There are serious concerns from the Christian community, the Muslim community, the Orthodox Jewish community and many other faith communities about the removal of the religious defence.

The petitioners would like to see the government not move forward with this amendment. They would like to see Parliament protect freedom of expression and freedom of religion and recognize that these are fundamental rights. They would like the House to put a stop to this government overreach, which would undermine the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 6—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-9

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the consideration of Government Business No. 6, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

Members will recall that the preference for questions during the 30 minutes is provided to the opposition, but not to the exclusion of some members from the government's side. Members should keep their interventions to approximately one minute, and they may speak more than once.

Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Jewish community, from one of the largest Jewish communities in the country, I do not believe that Bill C-9 will do anything to accomplish the protection of the Jewish community, but I would like to ask the minister a professional, legal question. The Liberals flaunt the new obstruction and intimidation offence, but it is already criminal to obstruct someone from entering a synagogue or a school. It is called assault. It is already criminal to intimidate someone from doing something they have a lawful right to do, because that is contrary to the Criminal Code section 423. It is called intimidation.

The minister does not have to listen to me. He should listen to Mark Sandler, a lawyer who understands this better than anyone. He testified before our committee at the invitation of the Liberals and said that the "proposed intimidation or obstruction sections don't make criminal conduct that is not already criminal."

Why is the minister representing that the new intimidation and obstruction offence will do anything, when in reality such conduct is already contrary to the Criminal Code?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just before I address the member's question squarely, I would like to point out with respect to the witness that he made reference to, Mark Sandler, that I actually had the chance to speak with him personally. He is sup-

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porting this bill. In addition to the intimidation and obstruction measures that the questioner has put to me, he has left out other important changes that would increase the penalties for people who commit a crime against a person on the basis of their identity, including their religious identity and including the colour of their skin or their sexual orientation.

With respect to the intimidation and obstruction offences, we believe that a gap exists. There could be some crossover with pre-existing offences that exist in the Criminal Code that may also constitute intimidation and obstruction, but we learned through other contexts, including to protect health care workers during the pandemic, that there is a gap that will allow us to protect religious communities and to ensure that they can practise their faith free of obstruction and intimidation and fully realize their right to freely practise their religion in this country.

• (1025)

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has a history of violating the charter rights of Canadians, from freedom of expression to freezing their bank accounts under the illegal Emergencies Act, etc.

Thirty million people of faith in Canada are expressing concern about Bill C-9 and removing the religious exemption under the hate speech law. We have heard from Christian evangelists, the Catholic Church, Muslim associations and Jewish associations. They all say that this bill is going to cause them to not be able to read their religious texts, because somebody will find them offensive and they will end up in prison.

Why does the minister not care what 30 million people of faith in this country think?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I care deeply what communities of faith think. I have had the opportunity to engage not just with members of the House and all parties who care deeply about the issue, but directly with organizations who represent people who are expressing very real concerns.

What I heard when we had an opportunity to dig into those concerns was that there were some reservations about the removal of the religious exemption, but there was a path forward. In fact, there was a flaw in the Conservative position that many of the stakeholders raised with me, because what they are advocating for is to recognize that the ordinary practice of faith could constitute the willful promotion of hate, but a defence should accrue. I disagree with this approach, by the way.

We believe that we should actually define hate to make clear that the ordinary practice of faith is never a hate crime to begin with. In addition to that changed definition, which the Conservatives were seemingly willing to work with us on before they continued their filibuster, there are additional protections in the charter that will give Canadians faith that they will be able to practise their faith freely, including the reading of religious texts.

Everyone in this House should know clearly that the government position is to defend the ability of Canadians to practise their faith.

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Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am hearing overwhelmingly from my constituents the concern they have about Bill C-9, in general on how it attacks free speech and freedom of expression, but specifically about the amendment tabled by the Liberals and the Bloc to remove the exemption for good-faith religious discussion about texts. We have already heard the former chair of the justice committee, now the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, cite several books of the Bible as being hate books, and we know that is blatantly false.

Many schools and churches in my riding teach the Bible as it is written. What guarantee would there be under this legislation that the professors and teachers in these institutions would not be criminalized?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the very clear and well-established charter protections that exist, we heard concerns that people wanted more certainty. That is why we were prepared to make further amendments to this bill to make absolutely clear that reading holy texts, participating in one's community of faith, engaging in services that are part of life as a community of faith, as a religious leader or as a member of a congregation, would all be permitted. We are willing to amend the legislation to put words to that effect directly in the bill, in addition to the charter protections. When the Conservatives realized they were getting "yes" for an answer, they picked up their filibuster and started using this issue to raise money by spreading misinformation to cause fear among Canadians.

My view is that we have had an opportunity to listen to communities and to address their concerns with thoughtful amendments. If we could come to an agreement, we could have a bill that would combat hate that all parties could support.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice continues to misrepresent what has happened. The Liberal government was not elected with a mandate to remove long-standing protections for religious speech. When facing the millions of Canadians affected by this and their concerns, the minister said he would consult and listen to those over the winter break. When coming back, the only response he has had is to say not to worry, the bill does not say what it says.

Even now, the minister says charter rights will protect Canadians, while the government has not said whether it will accept the Federal Court of Appeal finding that it violated the charter rights of Canadians with the invocation of the Emergencies Act. Canadians have every reason to be concerned with a government that does not have a record of upholding these fundamental freedoms.

If Canadians truly have nothing to fear, will the Minister of Justice stand up right now and denounce the words of his cabinet colleague, the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, who said it should be illegal to quote verses of the Bible that he says are inherently hateful? Will he denounce those comments right now?

• (1030)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the first charge that my hon. colleague has levied against me is that I may not have come through on the commitment to meet with religious organizations. I have a list of almost 30 in front of me now that I met with during the holiday break to ensure that we heard their perspective.

The second charge that he has levied against me is that we have not listened to the feedback. I would correct the record again. We were willing to take their feedback and put an amendment in the bill, an amendment, by the way, the Conservatives seemingly were going to put forward. They decided to continue their filibuster only when they realized we agreed with their position and wanted to add clarity to ensure that communities of faith would continue to be able to read their holy texts, preach the lessons of their faith of choice and live freely in Canada.

The position of the government is that the ability for Canadians to pray freely and practise their faith should continue fully, not only by virtue of the charter protections that exist but also by reflecting the feedback that I personally heard from religious leaders to change the language of the proposed bill to make this eminently clear.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the intentional spreading of misinformation is what we continue to witness from the Conservatives. The motivating factor behind their opposition to Bill C-9 is that of fundraising. I could table, if they wanted, an email in which the Conservative Party is attempting to raise money by spreading misinformation and asking the recipients to donate to the party.

The Speaker: Are those the member's speaking notes, or is that a prop?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, they are speaking notes, but I could table the document, if they like, which clearly shows that the motivating factor for the Conservative Party is to raise money by spreading misinformation.

Is the minister concerned about misinformation being spread by political entities in the House of Commons?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern that a lot of misinformation has come to characterize the politics of this debate rather than thoughtful deliberation on what would expand religious freedoms in this country, which is what Bill C-9 was designed to do from inception.

One of the reasons I have some skepticism over the nature of the complaints that have been registered by the party opposite is that its members have actually raised substantive objections to the text of the bill that have now been accommodated. They raised concerns about the role of the Attorney General's consent, which we are willing to accommodate. They raised concerns about the precise nature of the definition reflecting the court's decisions on the issue of hate crimes, which we are willing to accommodate. They have raised concerns about the removal of the religious exemption, which we are willing to make changes to to accommodate and to ensure that communities of faith continue to practise their religions freely.

When each of the concerns that were raised have been accommodated, or we have demonstrated a willingness to accommodate them in full, we have to ask ourselves what the motivation is to not only continue to oppose, which would be fine, but also obstruct and filibuster for months at a time.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have received petitions from thousands of people in my community of Cambridge who are deeply concerned about Bill C-9. It is not misinformation when Canadians took the time to write, call and sign petitions because they want their voices heard in this place, yet today the government is not only advancing legislation that many believe threatens freedom of expression and religious freedom, but also moving to shut down debate on that very bill. To my constituents, that feels like double censorship, as the government is limiting their freedoms and then limiting Parliament's ability to even debate it.

Why is the government so determined to silence debate on Bill C-9 instead of allowing Parliament the time to fully examine legislation that Canadians believe threatens their fundamental freedoms?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, first, there is no such limitation on the rights of Canadians contained in the bill. That is precisely the nature of the misinformation that has been the subject of the back-and-forth that we saw in the previous question. There are people who have real concerns. Those real concerns can be addressed by sharing valid information and by engaging in making changes where appropriate.

On the issue of limiting debate, I would point out that this bill has been debated now for nearly six months. It was tabled in September of last year. We moved to clause-by-clause in late November, almost four months ago. This bill has 12 clauses and is only a few pages long. The reason it has taken so long is that there has been no participation in debate by the party opposite. Instead, members opposite have used every opportunity to obstruct and filibuster to prevent that debate from happening.

When months have gone by, and when we have demonstrated a willingness to look under every stone, have every conversation and hear every argument, but the Conservatives continue to obstruct, at a certain point, we have to realize that Canadians expect the members they elect to the House of Commons to behave like grown-ups, advance legislation and allow full debate, but not obstruct just for the sake of obstruction.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Justice. I believe we are discussing a serious offence here, that of promoting hatred.

Can the hon. minister remind us what promoting hatred means in legal terms?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. It would be difficult for me to respond in French.

I think some details need to be clarified.

[*English*]

When we are dealing with the wilful promotion of hate, we are not dealing with disagreeing with or not liking another person; we

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are dealing with extreme vilification and detestation based on that person's identity. We are dealing with circumstances in communities where synagogues are being shot at, such as in Toronto, and where people are being harassed on their way to mosque. We are dealing with circumstances where members of the LGBTQ2 community cannot hold hands in public for fear they will face violence. We are dealing with people being assaulted on university campuses and in grocery stores because of the God they pray to.

These are not harmless crimes. We deserve to have laws that recognize when an entire community is impacted. It should attract a higher degree of moral culpability and more serious penalties when someone commits a crime not only for the sake of committing a crime but also for the sake of targeting a victim on the basis of who they are.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is really troubling when the government brings forward a bill that is about potentially censoring people. The minister has pointed out that the bill has been in the process of being debated for a while. Part of that is because, as time has gone on, we have been able to discover more and more troubling items within this particular bill. Had it been just an easy bill that everyone could get behind, that would have been fine. However, I have had so many people from my riding reach out to me with their deeply held faith positions. Whether they are from the Muslim community, the Christian community or the Hindu community, they are very concerned about what the bill would actually do and how it would impact their ability to counsel their children and live their lives the way they are choosing to do so, in peace and harmony.

Why is this the bill that the Liberals have decided they are going to ram through and not allow us to have a fulsome debate on when this is something that is so important to so many Canadians?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has raised two objections: one substantive and one procedural.

On the substantive objection, it is important that we recognize that, when concerns are sincerely held, they can be dealt with by either correcting misinformation or changing the bill when the concern is something that needs to be addressed. We heard examples that demanded changes, and we are willing to make those changes concerning the role of the Attorney General's consent, the definition of hatred and the ability of communities to practise their faith freely and with the certainty that it will not result in the commission of a crime.

On procedure, this is where I have to draw the members' attention: We are dealing with a bill that has been eligible for debate for six months, has been at clause-by-clause in committee for almost four months and has seen obscene obstruction, including Conservative members devolving into conversations about whether they and their spouses prefer puppies or kittens. If there were a serious debate to be had, we would entertain all arguments and would address them appropriately, but this debate ceased to be serious months ago.

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Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given the Liberal track record of flagrantly misusing government power, and I cite the misuse of the Emergencies Act, the freezing of citizen bank accounts, the intrusion on provincial jurisdiction numerous times, the arbitrary firearm confiscation by executive order and the elements of the Impact Assessment Act that were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada, if the government can punish speech it considers hateful now, what is stopping it from silencing any dissent tomorrow?

Furthermore, if the government can do that, what about future governments? Are they going to be able to silence dissent simply by ruling it hateful?

• (1040)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, it is important, when it comes to our charter rights, that we look at not only statements of any government, present, future or past, but also at what that government is or was proposing to do to assess the validity against the rules that constrain the powers of government outlined in our Constitution and, indeed, in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I will give some comfort to my colleague opposite by pointing out that the provisions he seems concerned with do not change the behaviour that is criminalized, but put more serious penalties in place, recognizing that a crime should be treated more seriously when someone commits a crime against a victim on the basis of their identity. I, for one, think it would be appropriate for Canada's criminal laws to reflect a higher degree of moral culpability when a Jewish person is targeted by virtue of their being Jewish, when a Muslim person is targeted on the basis of their being Muslim or when a person of colour is targeted on the basis of the colour of their skin.

We have an opportunity to move forward in a fashion that respects our Constitution, as we know that these crimes have been subjected to constitutional scrutiny in courts and have been previously upheld.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why have hate crimes increased by 85% since the Liberals took power over 10 years ago?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, trying to attribute partisan blame to hate crimes in this country reflects the level of seriousness that the Conservatives are refusing to bring into this debate.

When it comes to hate crimes, there are a number of challenges that we need to overcome. Some of it is having tougher laws on the books, including crimes that make it easier to prosecute. We also need to have more support for the front lines, in collaboration with provincial partners, and we need to be making upstream investments to help build healthier people who will be less prone to commit hate crimes in the first place. To boil it down to one party being in power at one level of government or another is a disservice to the seriousness that the issue of hate should be dealt with.

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard in response to the Minister of Justice's comments, multiple times, that we should enforce the existing law. Enforcing the existing law is one thing; sending a message to

police about what the House of Commons believes we should be doing about hate crimes and adding additional offences is another.

My questions are, one, does the minister have the power to tell the Toronto police, the Montreal police or any other municipal police in this country to enforce the law in the way that the minister intends them to enforce it? In other words, do they have to listen to him? Two, would the House of Commons and the Parliament of Canada not be giving a very clear message to the police if we were to adopt the combatting hate act?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his extraordinary advocacy in the House on behalf of the Jewish community, including on Bill C-9.

A direct answer to his question is that it would obviously be an affront to the role that I hold in the House and in this country if I were to start calling up law enforcement and directing them to intervene on individual prosecutions. However, one thing that we can do to make the lives of law enforcement easier when it comes to enforcing the laws that are on the books is to listen to their recommendations and giving clarity on what the definition of hate should actually consist of.

Bill C-9 would take the common-law definition and codify it to give certainty to law enforcement as to when a hate crime exists, which would allow them to independently take action to enforce the law on the books.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9, as drafted, did not seek the removal of a 50-plus-year-old legal defence, nor did any witnesses called by the Liberal committee members speak on behalf of the Liberal Party to remove this long-held defence. In fact, no interventions by any Liberal committee members sought clarification on the removal of the defence.

We had moved to clause by clause, and we were progressing very well. In fact, there was more in common between the Liberals and the Conservatives on the terms of Bill C-9 than not, but approximately one week into clause-by-clause, all of a sudden a secret weekend backroom deal between the Minister of Justice and the Bloc Québécois took precedence.

Why did a political advantage mean more to the Liberal government than the will of the Canadian people and the faith leaders across this country who are adamantly opposed to the removal of this defence?

• (1045)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, first let me address the revisionist history and the telling of the story we just sat through. When it comes to the first time the committee heard any testimony or any discussion about the proposed removal of the religious exemption, I know that member was in the room because the question was put to me. If he does not believe me, we thankfully now have video capabilities in the room, and he can see that, when the question was put to me, I said I would remain open to it but that I would leave it to the majority of the members of the committee.

When we sought to build partnerships with all parties to advance a path forward for this bill based on the points of common understanding and agreement that the member signalled, it was very clear that only one other party supported the essence of the bill, which is to combat hate and take a firmer line against hate crimes in this country. What is curious is that the Conservatives maintained the position that we should classify religious practices as something that could constitute the wilful promotion of hate but allow a legal defence on the basis that it is religious speech. Instead, we prefer to take the approach of saying that practising one's faith is never a hate crime to begin with, and that is a position I will stand firmly in defence of.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has tried to paint this picture of their listening to faith communities and making adjustments, but the objective reality is that not a single faith community or organization has changed in its opposition to the removal of the religious defence over the last four months. He cannot point to a single organization that has changed its position in response to this fake attempt to adjust this. In fact, over 350 different Muslim organizations have signed a letter underlining their continuing opposition to this. Christian leaders continue to be opposed to this. The Orthodox Jewish community continues to be opposed to what the government is doing in this regard.

Will the minister tell the truth about what he is hearing from stakeholders, namely that not a single faith organization has changed its position in response to this fake consultation?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, there is an interesting trick in debate that the member just used to hide the fact that there are supporters of this bill. There are religious communities that have supported this bill from inception, including the Jewish community. I find it curious that the member would only survey communities of faith that serve his argument in this moment.

I would say, with respect to the other communities of faith that I have personally engaged with, along with my team and my department, we did hear concerns, but from what we heard, we know that we can accommodate those concerns by building language into the law that would ensure that the practice of a person's faith would not be treated as a hate crime. We are willing to make that change. Part of the reason we are here is that, upon our efforts to do so at committee, we were met with continued Conservative obstruction.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister waxes eloquent about the bill and this motion, saying it is the best thing since sliced bread, that there is nothing to worry about and to trust in him. It reminds me of some words of a certain reptile in the *The Jungle Book* named Kaa, I believe. The

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minister says, "Just trust in us. Do not listen to all these religious organizations, all these churches, synagogues and mosques. Just trust in us." Well, we do not trust in them at all. They have a track record.

Does the minister not recognize that there is such a contradiction between them saying they are promoting the protection of religious communities and, at the same time, removing the defence of religious expression, which was put in by Pierre Elliott Trudeau with Bill C-3, the original hate propaganda bill. Does the minister not recognize the concerns of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Canadians across Canada, and recognize that we do not trust in them?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, we know our opponents have lost confidence in their own argument when they resort to attacks based on the trustworthiness of their opponent in a debate.

If the member was actually listening to my responses to previous questions, he would know I said he should not trust any present or future or past government and that he should do an independent assessment of what the laws actually say.

We have been listening to those communities of faith. We have engaged with them and told them we are willing to actually make amendments to reflect the concerns they have, the precise amendments that the Conservatives were contemplating and thinking of putting forward. Upon realizing we were going to say yes, to agree to the amendments that we both heard from the same communities of faith, the Conservatives picked up their filibuster and demonstrated they are not interested in collaborating. They are not interested in allowing the bill to proceed, which is why we are here to advance the debate, so we can actually offer protections to the communities of faith that have justified our including this important law in our campaign platform during the last federal election. Canadians, including Canadian communities of faith, support it.

• (1050)

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to address the hon. minister on the matter before us right now, which is shutting down debate on Bill C-9, rather than the details within Bill C-9. I think the bill needs much more debate and discussion, which is why I hope the government will withdraw the attempt at closure on Bill C-9 before we have had an opportunity to discuss it properly.

I know the minister will say it was stuck at clause-by-clause. In this case, I will absolutely agree that the Conservatives were obstructing in the committee on Bill C-9. They have been so routinely accused of filibustering and obstructing when they have not that I feel it is worthwhile pointing out, in this one instance, that there has been an attempt to slow down Bill C-9.

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I find much of the bill objectionable. Certainly, the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, in its brief to the minister, has pointed out how the intimidation and disruption sections are overly broad and create a really large risk of discretionary enforcement by police that will leave people who are engaged in lawful exercise of their democratic rights and free speech on the wrong side of a law that is vague and discretionary.

I urge the minister to please reconsider and withdraw the motion under debate at the moment so we can have a full discussion and debate, which is what Parliament is for.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, of course, I have enormous respect for my colleague representing Saanich—Gulf Islands, who shares a history from my part of the world as well. I understand her concerns, first, about the limitation of debate, which is not normally the approach that I would like to take. However, when we see that important legislation is not being allowed to move forward with debate, when it is being obstructed and filibustered, as she has acknowledged, we have to take an opportunity to move it to the next step.

There will be additional opportunities to put this matter to a vote, not only in the House of Commons but, of course, for our colleagues in the Senate to consider the bill and to propose amendments as they see fit.

With respect to the substantive challenges she has raised, we have gone through efforts to ensure that the ability of Canadians to express themselves freely, to associate with one another, to take part in protests where they share information but do not promote hate, would be protected. My view is that we have done that job. If parliamentarians have an opportunity to put forward amendments, they should know that those would be considered in good faith.

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to acknowledge today that by including the removal of the religious defence clause, his actions have actually sown more fear and division in Canadian society. This was a bill on which there was broad consensus when it was first brought forward. With the inclusion of the removal of the religious defence clause, he has diminished public support for the position he is taking.

Will he acknowledge that this amendment will cause more division and fear among religious communities, especially in Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, which is one of the most faith-based ridings in all of Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I would disagree with my colleague's characterization that there was a broad base of support among different parties when the bill was first put forward. I would refer to the testimony at the justice committee when I personally appeared. At least two of the three Conservative members made very clear that they were looking for a reason to oppose the bill because they saw a political opportunity in doing so.

In addition, he has raised concern about the religious exemption. This was a change that came from other parties we worked with and that we were willing to accept because we did not think it would have the impact that they are now describing. We are willing to go a step further, reflect the feedback we have heard from communities of faith and amend the bill to make clear that the practice

of one's faith will not be considered a crime in Canada. That is the position of the government.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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.

● (1055)

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we request a recorded vote, please.

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1135)

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

(*Division No. 83*)

YEAS

Members

Acan	Al Soud
Ali	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Bains	Baker
Bardeesy	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Belanger (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River)
Bendayan	Bittle
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blois	Bonin
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Carney	Carr
Casey	Chagger
Champagne	Champoux
Chang	Chartrand
Chatel	Chen
Chenette	Chi
Church	Clark
Connors	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Dandurand	Danko
DeBellefeuille	d'Entremont
Deschênes	Deschênes-Thériault
Desrochers	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Duclos	Duguid
Dzerowicz	Earle
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fancy	Fanjoy
Fergus	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Fry
Fuhr	Gaheer
Gainey	Garon
Gasparro	Gaudreau
Gerretsen	Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)

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Gould
Guay
Gull-Masty
Hanley
Hepfner
Hodgson
Housefather
Iacono
Jeneroux
Joseph
Kelloway
Klassen
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lavack
LeBlanc
Lemire
Long
Ma
MacDonald (Cardigan)
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
Mendès
Miedema
Mingarelli
Myles
Nathan
Noormohamed
Ntumba
Olszewski
Osborne
Petitpas Taylor
Provost
Rana
Rocheffort
Royer
Saini
Sari
Sawatzky
Sgro
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard
Solomon
Ste-Marie
Sudds
Thériault
Turnbull
Villeneuve
Weiler
Yip
Zerucelli

Greaves
Guilbeault
Hajdu
Harrison
Hirtle
Hogan
Hussen
Jaczek
Joly
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Lambropoulos
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Larouche
Lauzon
Lavoie
Leitão
Lightbound
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
McKelvie
McKnight
Ménard
Michel
Miller
Morrissey
Naqvi
Nguyen
Normandin
Oliphant
O'Rourke
Perron
Powlowski
Ramsay
Robertson
Romanado
Sahota
Sarai
Savard-Tremblay
Schieffe
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sodhi
Sousa
St-Pierre
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Barrett

Berthold
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Aitchison
Allison
Anstey
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Bailey
Barlow
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Block
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Bragdon
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Chambers
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Deltell
Doherty
Duncan
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Gallant
Généreux
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Godin
Gourde
Guglielmin
Hallan
Ho
Holman
Jansen
Johns
Khanna
Kirkland
Konanz
Kramp-Neuman
Kuruc
Kwan
Lantsman
Lawton
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lobb
Majumdar

Mantle
Mazier
McKenzie
McPherson
Menegakis
Morin
Motz
Nater
Paul-Hus
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Richards
Rood
Rowe
Scheer
Seeback
Small
Stevenson
Strauss
Thomas
Tolmie
Van Popta
Viersen
Wagantall
Waugh

Chong
Cody
Dalton
Davidson
Dawson
Diotte
Dowdall
Epp
Falk (Provencher)
Gazan
Genuis
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gladu
Goodridge
Groleau
Gunn
Hardy
Hoback
Idlout
Jivani
Kelly
Kibble
Kmiec
Kram
Kronis
Kusie
Lake
Lawrence
Lefebvre
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Mahal
Malette (Kapusking—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
May
McCauley
McLean (Calgary Centre)
Melillo
Moore
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PAIRED

Members

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Jackson
Valdez

Grant
Martel
van Koevorden — 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

CONSIDERATION OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 6

The House resumed from March 9 consideration of the motion.

Roman Baber (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am Jewish and I represent one of the largest Jewish communities in Canada. I am disgusted by the Liberal government and how it pretends that the Jewish community wants Bill C-9 passed, which is nonsense. The Liberals are saying that while adding fuel to the fire of Jew hatred in Canada.

When the Prime Minister says on the campaign trail that he knows there is genocide in Gaza, he fuels Jew hatred. When Liberals engage in the greatest blood libel of the 21st century, that the Jewish state is using starvation as a weapon of war, they fuel Jew hatred. When they sanction Israel to stop the Gaza war for Hamas to survive, they encourage terrorists in the Middle East and here at home to keep up the jihad. When the Prime Minister recognized the Palestinian state, he rewarded the brutality of Hamas, and he did so on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. We will never forget that.

Why do the Liberals not call for the enforcement of existing laws? Masked thugs chant for intifada every Sunday at Sheppard and Bathurst. Did anyone say, "Stop. It is incitement to violence so arrest them"? When they march on residential streets frightening neighbours, did anyone say, "What is wrong with you, Olivia Chow?" Did anyone say, "What is wrong with you, Chief of Police Demkiw? It is mischief so arrest them"?

Please save your tweets and platitudes. Three synagogues were shot at last week in the city of Toronto. Bill C-9 would do nothing to stop that.

With respect to the bill, the Liberals flaunt the new obstruction and intimidation offence, but it is already criminal to obstruct someone from entering a synagogue. It is called assault. It is already criminal to intimidate someone from doing something they have a lawful right to do. That is intimidation and contrary to section 423 of the Criminal Code.

However, do not listen to me. Listen to Mark Sandler, a lawyer who understands this better than anyone in the country and who was invited to testify at the justice committee by both me and the Liberals. He said, "proposed intimidation or obstruction sections don't make criminal conduct that is not already criminal." There is nothing new here.

With respect to the new hate-motivated offence, it already effectively exists through sentencing. If an offence is motivated by hate, that is an aggravating factor upon sentencing. However, the new hate-motivated offence in Bill C-9 would not just criminalize criminal conduct. It would also criminalize any hate offence that is tacked onto a civil offence, so non-criminal conduct could now become criminal. This is very dangerous, and the threshold to convict for hatred would be lowered from a good test established by the Supreme Court 40 years ago.

I am telling the Jewish community that Bill C-9 would do nothing to protect us. In fact, I believe that Bill C-9 would be weaponized against us.

However, this is what we can do to protect Canada's Jewish community. First, no one is talking about law enforcement. This is now

beyond a local police problem. We need the RCMP in North York. We need the RCMP in Thornhill. We have RCMP units called integrated national security enforcement teams, which work with the CBSA and local police to counter terrorism. One needs to be empowered locally to protect the Jewish community.

Second, there are about 700 IRGC agents in Canada, and according to Global News, there are 450 members linked to Hamas. Why are the Liberals allowing this? Let us investigate these networks and expel these individuals from Canada.

Third is to put political pressure on mayors and police to stop the Jew hatred on our streets that is already criminal. Stop the calls for intifada, which is incitement to violence and is already illegal and criminalized in the U.K. End the intimidation of Jewish-owned businesses. Conservatives will defend the Jewish community, but Bill C-9 is a Trojan horse to limit free speech.

Shame on the Liberals for Bill C-9. Shame on the Liberals for using the Jewish community as a prop. Shame on you for this motion closing debate.

• (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I remind the hon. member that I did not put forth any motion and that "shame on you" is not actually admissible.

The hon. secretary of state.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Madam Speaker, that was a very interesting speech. I met with several synagogues over this last week, especially the ones that were affected by the shootings in Toronto, and the Toronto Islamic Centre, which has been threatened with a mass shooting similar to what we saw in New Zealand. These are horrific incidents of hate that we are seeing across our country. It seems like the member is saying, "Do something now, but do not do anything. Do not put this bill forward. We do not want tweets, yet pressure the mayors; therefore, just tweet." It is a very contradictory type of message.

Without a law to stop hate, terrorism and symbols of hate in our communities, we need this piece of legislation. Do we not?

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Roman Baber: Madam Speaker, I do not know what the secretary of state is talking about. I was at the press conference at Shaarei Shomayim three days ago, next to the public safety minister, who was not able to say anything. With respect to concrete solutions, if the secretary of state had listened to my speech, I proposed three concrete solutions at the very least. Number one is to get the RCMP involved. We have a special unit within the RCMP to deal with this. It is now beyond local police. Number two, we have 700 IRGC-connected individuals in Canada, and maybe 450 individuals connected to Hamas according to Global News. How about we investigate those networks and expel those individuals? Number three, why do you not do something and call for law enforcement of existing laws?

It is illegal to call for incitement to violence. It is illegal to call for intifada, which is a violent revolt, and it is illegal to intimidate Jewish businesses. Do something about it.

• (1145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Can I remind the hon. member to speak through the Chair? I cannot do anything about it.

[*Translation*]

Questions and comments.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague's passionate speech was about laws that are already on the books, and I think that is the comment that we have heard a lot from this side. We just heard the Minister of Justice speak about why he brought in closure. Everything he talked about is already a law on the books, so my question to my learned colleague is this: These laws are already on the books and we are seeing this hate grow in Canada year after year. In 10 years, hate crimes have grown by about 87%.

Why can we not ensure that the laws that are already on the books are enforced to tamp down this hatred of different religions?

Roman Baber: Madam Speaker, I actually want to specify that, specifically with respect to the Jewish community, since the election of the Liberal government 10 years ago, hate crimes against the Jewish community have more than quadrupled. Shame on them for that. With respect to the specific question that the member is asking, I would like to clarify for the benefit of the House that this is not politics; this is law. We had Mark Sandler saying that the bill would do nothing new with respect to intimidation and obstruction. If someone intimidates me from entering a synagogue or an educational institution, that is intimidation contrary to section 423. If someone is obstructing my entrance physically, that is an assault. This is all common sense.

With respect to the hate-motivated offence, in sentencing, the hate-motivated offence is already factored in. If it is hate motivated, it will be caught in sentencing, but what the bill's hate-motivated offence would do is criminalize hatred with respect to any civil offence contrary to any act of Parliament. They would make non-criminal conduct criminal. This would be a huge error.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was a part of the Doug Ford government at one point, and the Doug Ford government would have had the opportunity to do some of the things that he is advocating for here. Can the member give a clear indication as to why he was so ineffective in getting the Doug Ford government to take some of the actions he is telling the government to do? I find his assertions to be absolutely ridiculous.

At a time when we have communities across the country looking at initiatives, such as this bill, that will make a difference, and it was a part of an election platform, why is it that the member, whom I would maybe characterize as being a little over to the right and maybe even possibly to the far right, feels fundamentally that legislation of this nature is bad for freedom?

Roman Baber: Madam Speaker, I have just articulated a sensible legal argument in response to the legislation. Anybody who does not agree with the member is, apparently, far right. Normal people, middle-of-the-line centrists, are now far right according to the Liberal Party.

I am proud of my time in the Ford government. I wear my time in the Ford government and the provincial legislature as a badge of honour.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are now very familiar with Václav Havel's greengrocer, who displays a sign in his window not because he believes it but because it is what one does, what is familiar and what is required.

In Davos, the Prime Minister talked about taking the sign out of the window. Today, I want to talk about how the sign got there in the first place, because Havel's parable was a warning, a warning about how democracy and freedom degrade when we create a society where people say what they are supposed to say, regardless of what they believe, and about the problems that arise when the only acceptable speech is narrowed to what is written on signs. As many of those who have immigrated to this great country will tell us, where there are signs in windows, the signs always start out fine. The problem is that there inevitably comes a time when the people in charge change the signs, and by the time they do, it is always too late. There is no more room for dissent, and the people who helped put up the signs find that they have become prisoners in the very system they helped build.

The problem is that when the signs first go up, people like them. They are reassuring. They create a sense of moral clarity for the majority whose views are reflected in them, but that comfort comes at an unacceptable cost. When societies begin rewarding the display of approved ideas instead of the honest exchange of them, something essential begins to erode. It surprises me that the government of a Prime Minister who invoked Havel's greengrocer would be allowed to do what it is doing today. Members should make no mistake about it. This motion and the sentiments behind it, along with the bill, are a giant sign in a very small window. That is where the real risks to our society begin.

Government Orders

If the story of Bill C-9 were a play, we would now be in the third act. In the first act, when the bill was introduced, I raised three serious concerns in the chamber, two of which have not been fixed in committee. The first is the vagueness of the bill's definition of hate. Criminal law must be clear and precise. When definitions are vague, they create uncertainty about what speech will be criminalized, and that creates an opportunity for weaponization outside of the criminal system. The second is the reality that the laws we already have in Canada to combat hate and incitement to violence on the basis of hate are not being enforced. Where provincial governments are unwilling or unable to enforce existing words, adding more words is not going to help.

The concerns I expressed were not Conservative. They are shared by a remarkably broad coalition of Canadians. Religious organizations and civil liberties groups from across the political spectrum have raised similar alarms. Groups as diverse as the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Christian Legal Fellowship, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the rabbinical council of Toronto all sounded the alarm about the bill's potential impact on freedom of expression and religious liberty. A rabbi, a priest and an imam literally approached the bar of the House of Commons, and the government ignored them. Despite those concerns, we moved the bill to committee because we agreed with its stated objectives. No one in the House supports hatred or violence directed at any community. Canadians expect Parliament to confront both.

That brings us to the second act. At committee, the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois amended the bill to remove the long-standing religious defence contained in section 319 of the Criminal Code. This defence protects statements made in good faith on a religious subject based on belief in a religious text. That is where everything went off the rails.

This defence has never protected the deliberate promotion of hatred or calls for violence. It exists to ensure that Canadians can express sincere religious beliefs without fear that their words could be criminalized simply because someone else finds them offensive. It also exists so that dialogue can happen that might cause people to change those views. When the Liberal-Bloc amendment passed, it immediately revealed the danger that many of us had warned about. Within hours, people online were celebrating the change and claiming that individuals could now be prosecuted for expressing traditional religious views. That is not what the law actually says, but the reaction illustrates the chilling effect that the amendment creates. It encourages the belief that the Criminal Code can now be used to silence views that people dislike.

• (1150)

Canada's legal tradition has long recognized the importance of state neutrality in matters of faith. Parliament included the religious defence in the hate propaganda provisions because it understood that criminal law must not be used to police religious doctrine. The state must not edit the Bible. Our courts have recognized that balance. In the *Keegstra* decision, the Supreme Court upheld Canada's hate propaganda laws in part because of the safeguards Parliament had included, including the protection for good-faith religious expression that the House now seeks to remove.

Parliament has revisited these provisions several times over the decades, as new groups were added to the Criminal Code. Each time, members across party lines concluded that protecting vulnerable communities and protecting freedom of religion must go hand in hand. Removing that safeguard continues to risk upsetting a constitutional balance that has been carefully managed for decades.

Then, during the parliamentary break, something interesting happened. The government began hearing from Canadians who did not want the sign in the window. Canadians from across the political and religious spectrum were alarmed at the direction the bill has taken. One might have expected the government to reflect and reconsider, but instead it decided to shut down debate on its own bill, just a few minutes ago, which brings us to the third act.

We are now debating Bill C-9 under time constraints because the government is determined to pass it quickly, even if that means passing it in a way that restricts our ability to continue to have dialogue about these topics in society. The irony is difficult to miss. When government seeks to expand the power of the state to regulate expression while restricting debate about those powers, Parliament should pause, because the danger is not only that the law might punish the wrong people. The deeper danger is that it may change how people speak to each other in the first place.

Canada can and must confront hatred, but criminal law must be precise, restrained and grounded in constitutional principles. I return to the very arguments I stood to make in the House in September, in the first act of the discussion on the bill. If we are serious about addressing hatred, I remain convinced and reiterate that the first step is to work with the provinces and municipalities to enforce the laws we already have. The Criminal Code already prohibits the wilful promotion of hatred and the incitement of violence. Those provisions should be applied consistently and effectively.

If real gaps exist, Parliament can address them, but any changes must be carefully drafted and respectful of the charter rights that define our country. What we should not do is expand vague criminal provisions, remove long-standing safeguards for religious expression and then rush the legislation through Parliament by shutting down debate. That approach does not strengthen public confidence in the law. It weakens it, for those who feel threatened.

A free society should never push its citizens toward the greengrocer's window where the safest choice is to display the approved message and keep one's real beliefs to oneself, and Parliament should never pass a law that risks creating that pressure in the first place.

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• (1155)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, less than a year ago, Canadians elected a new Prime Minister. A part of the Liberal election platform was that we would deal with the issue of hate, which is very real and tangible. We brought in legislation months ago, and the Conservatives have made the decision that they do not want to see the hate legislation.

The Conservative Party does not make up the majority of the members of Parliament. The Conservative Party's intention is to never let the legislation pass, even though it was a campaign commitment. Another opposition party has decided that it is time we allow this legislation to pass. Therefore, we have a majority of members of Parliament saying that it is time. How is that anti-democratic?

The only party that is being anti-democratic on this issue is the Conservative Party, because its members refuse to accept the legislation in terms of allowing it to go through the process when a majority of MPs want to see it go through the process.

Tamara Kronis: Madam Speaker, I am not sure that the hon. member listened to my speech. I have just engaged in detail with the views of the government. I am not saying the government does not have the right to pass any legislation it can get through the House. What I am saying is that it ought to think twice about what it has heard from Canadians about the legislation. I am suggesting that the government ought to consider that it is limiting debate on a conversation that is not finished.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Madam Speaker, a few years ago, preacher Adil Charkaoui said the following at a demonstration: “Allah, take care of these Zionist aggressors. Allah, take care of the enemies of the people of Gaza. Allah, identify them all, then exterminate them. And don't spare any of them.”

Quebec's director of criminal and penal prosecutions said that he did not have the tools to make an arrest following these hatred-promoting remarks. According to Eta Yudin, the vice-president of the Quebec branch of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, this shows clear gaps in the Criminal Code, which has not been adapted to protect the public from hate speech.

Here is my question for my colleague: Should the government take action in that regard?

• (1200)

[*English*]

Tamara Kronis: Madam Speaker, the position that law enforcement officers and criminal lawyers have taken is that the existing provisions of the Criminal Code are sufficient to deal with that situation. The government has not put forward any argument to suggest that the changes that would be made by this bill would result in that arrest. In fact, I would be willing to go so far as to predict right now that the day after Bill C-9 is passed, no one would be arrested who could not be arrested today.

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Madam Speaker, recently a Canadian journalist was fined three-quarters of a million dollars for observing that there are only two

genders. The reason I mention this is that it is an example of how well-meant but subjective ideas can slide sideways into something that is completely against free speech.

Could my colleague elaborate on why it is so important that any changes to the system fully respect the freedoms guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly the freedom of religion, and what safeguards she believes should be included to ensure those rights remain protected?

Tamara Kronis: Madam Speaker, within an hour of the Liberal-Bloc amendment to remove the defence of religious freedoms associated with the Criminal Code provisions in section 319, I received a text from a constituent saying how delighted that person was that these changes had passed so that a whole bunch of people could now be thrown in jail.

I made this comment at committee. I do not for one second think that enforcement is going to change as a result of this bill being passed. I do think there will be a whole bunch of words thrown around, a whole bunch of allegations made, and it is going to take us years to sort out the legal mess that results from people's opinions about the consequences of changing these provisions in the code.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combating Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle.

Every Canadian should be able to walk into their place of worship, send their children to school or gather in their community without fear. They should not have to look over their shoulder or wonder whether someone outside is shouting threats, blocking the entrance or intimidating them simply because of who they are, yet for too many Canadians today, that fear is real.

During the last week, I visited synagogue Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto, Temple Emanu-El and the Shaarei Shomayim congregation in Toronto. Those synagogues have been victim to shooting incidents. I also visited the Toronto Islamic Centre, which was recently in the news for receiving threats of a mass shooting. That is precisely why, in September, having seen the rise of hate crimes in our community, our government introduced Bill C-9, the combatting hate act. This legislation is about protecting Canadians and defending a basic principle that in Canada, every person should be able to gather, worship and live in their community without fear or intimidation.

The bill takes three clear steps to make that principle real. First, the bill would create two new offences to stop people from intimidating or blocking others from entering places used by their communities, such as places of worship or community centres. For example, it would make it illegal to block the entrance of a synagogue or mosque to stop people from going inside to pray. We had heard from many community groups that due to the rise in protests happening at places of worship, they needed the federal government to put forward legislation like this so that it could apply across the country. We have seen municipalities and some provinces recently step up, but they had asked the federal government to act. That is exactly what we are doing with this bill.

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Second, it would create a stand-alone hate-motivated offence. Right now, if someone attacks a person because of their faith, identity or skin colour, they can be charged with assault, and the hate motive is only considered later at sentencing. This is a very important point. It has been brought up many times here today that this bill would not change anything. That is not true. Right now, the hate motivation would only be considered at sentencing. Under this bill, the hate motive would be recognized in the offence itself from the start, which would then have an impact on bail hearings and many other preliminary hearings.

Third, it would address the wilful promotion of hatred through the public display of hate or terrorist symbols. This is a very important point that many communities have brought to our attention. There have been, even on Parliament Hill, the display of terrorist symbols at Canada's Parliament.

An hon. member: Shame.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, that is shameful, and we are going to put a stop to that. This would not criminalize the mere display of a symbol, but it would target situations where symbols like Nazi imagery are shown in public with the clear intention of promoting hatred against certain communities. This motion calls on the justice committee to put an end to the obstruction and delay tactics that have prevented progress on the combatting hate act, which has now been before the committee for over six months.

Canadians might be surprised by this delay. After all, much of what is in Bill C-9 comes directly from the December 2024 fighting anti-Semitism report of the justice committee. Many members took part in this committee's hearings. This was a special anti-Semitism report that called for these types of steps to be taken. It called on the government to introduce measures to define "hate", create a stand-alone hate crime offence and criminalize intimidation targeting religious groups. As a news flash to many Conservative colleagues who took an active part in this committee, all of these measures are in Bill C-9.

• (1205)

Fast-forward from the Conservatives of 2024 to the Conservatives of 2026, and suddenly the very measures they once backed are now being blocked and delayed in committee. Canadians are left asking a simple question: Which Conservatives should they believe, the ones from 2024 who said Parliament must act against hate, or the 2026 Trumpian-style Conservatives who now stand in the way of legislating against the hatred and intimidation our most vulnerable communities are facing?

Parliament has already spent significant time debating this bill. Since September 2025, it has been debated in the House and studied extensively at committee with over 30 witnesses heard, amendments proposed and every clause examined. In total, more than 35 hours have been spent studying a bill that is only eight pages long. We have spent 35 hours studying eight pages. That is thorough scrutiny.

I recognize it may have been tempting for a small number of Conservative MPs to spread false claims that this bill would threaten religious freedom and free speech, and to use those claims to raise a few dollars from faith communities at rallies. Even in the

face of that, the Liberals were willing to work with them. We were ready to find common ground and added a clause for greater certainty stating clearly that the right to pray, teach or quote religious texts would not be affected.

After all, we are the party that literally enshrined freedom of religion in one of the most important documents in this country: the charter. Unfortunately, even after we responded to concerns raised by a few Conservative MPs, and even after religious communities from across the country backed this new clarifying amendment and asked Parliament to move forward, Conservatives at the justice committee still kept obstructing.

Canadians see this. Canadians get frustrated when they see Conservative members like the member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South spend hours speaking about his admiration for cats and dogs, instead of addressing the issue of hate in this country. The member is the Leader of the Opposition's designated champion on fighting hate, yet this is the same member who previously claimed that the observation of the Polytechnique shooting was a fake holiday, the same member who defended Holocaust deniers on the radio by suggesting that saying the Holocaust never happened is free speech and the same member who stood up for Pegida, a white supremacist organization, after the 2017 Quebec City mosque attack that left six men dead. They were fathers, sons and husbands who were killed while praying by a vile person who admired the same group.

Canadians get frustrated when they see the Conservative member for York Centre waste an entire committee meeting talking about what he had for lunch, while synagogues in his own country, in his own community, are facing threats and while CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, is asking him and Parliament to pass Bill C-9 quickly. The member for York Centre was elected to bring the voice of his community to Parliament. Many people in his community are asking him to support this anti-hate bill that would help keep them safe. Instead of bringing his community's voice to Ottawa, he is bringing his leader's voice back to his community. That is not the duty of a member of Parliament. I believe that the member supports this bill because I have seen him work constructively in committee. I know he appreciated the amendment we introduced to clarify that religious freedom would not be affected by this legislation. I believe he would like to move forward and represent his community, but his leader is telling him not to.

Page 19 of our platform made a clear commitment to Canadians. It promised to criminalize intimidation and obstruction targeting those who simply want to access their community centres and places of worship, and to strengthen protections for communities facing hate-motivated crimes. Canadians, including the people of Carleton, made their choice at the ballot box and want us to implement the commitments in the platform. Bill C-9 delivers on those promises.

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For more than six months now, communities across the country have been waiting for Parliament to act. Jewish communities facing rising anti-Semitism, Muslim communities facing Islamophobia, Christians seeing their churches being burned and many other vulnerable communities who simply want to gather, worship and live safely have been asking us to move forward.

• (1210)

That is why this motion calls on the justice committee to finally complete—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have known that member for a long time and, frankly, she is normally a lot better than that. Maybe this illustrates the pitfalls of reading a speech written by political staff, because that speech contained a litany of false personal attacks and no engagement with the substance of the bill.

Here is the reality. Faith communities across this country have raised significant concerns about this bill, in particular the religious defence. That religious defence issue was a late amendment that was not studied at all at committee. There were no witnesses called to testify on the issue of religious defence. It was a backroom deal cooked up by the Liberals and the Bloc.

There is not a single faith community that had these concerns before that has been placated by the fake compromise of the Liberals. Why did she choose not to address these serious, substantive problems with the bill and to instead resort to personal attacks?

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, anything that I mentioned in my speech is a matter of public record. Nothing I have said has been false. It has all been documented, whether it is on record at the committee stage or in past statements made by Conservative members, which are well documented, either on radio airwaves or in articles. I stand by everything I have said.

• (1215)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate what the secretary of state has put on the record, which in a very significant way reflects the reality of how the Conservative Party has really changed and moved further to the right. We can compare the Conservative Party of just a couple of years ago, when they were supporting initiatives of this nature, to the party under the current leadership that appears to oppose it. I really questioned the motivation, at least until I received an email. In that email, they were spreading misinformation and using “donate here” buttons in order to generate funds.

It seems to me that the motivating factor for the Conservative Party is more about the Conservative Party than the public interest of Canada.

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, this bill was debated at the second reading stage. For those watching, the second reading stage is before the bill even goes to committee, and even at that time,

there were several Conservative members who spoke against the bill and had lots of reservations about the bill.

Now they claim that the only time they had reservations was when the freedom of religion defence came up in committee. Even when that amendment came up and was discussed at the committee, every witness at committee was questioned about it. There was discussion. For the member to state that there was no discussion on the issue is disingenuous. He could go back and see all the video clips and film from the committee hearings or he could read all about it.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to again clear up misleading information from the Liberal Party and the secretary of state for crime, who is the author of that. She was not at committee. I was at committee for each and every meeting. There was not one witness called by the Liberal Party of Canada in support of the removal of this 50-year-old defence. Not one question was put to any witnesses by any Liberal committee members in support of the removal of the defence.

Why do the political interests of the Liberal Party of Canada take precedence over Canadians?

Hon. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, there were many questions brought up by members of the committee. The discussion happened amongst all members of the committee. That is my clarification for that. Plus, it is so essential that we ban these hate symbols that are used to intimidate and promote terrorism in our country. The Conservatives are against that. Why is that?

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the motion before the House, but also about something larger than procedure. I rise to speak about responsibility, the responsibility we hold as legislators when Canadians are facing real threats in their communities.

Bill C-9, the combatting hate act, has now been before Parliament for months. It was introduced on September 19, 2025. It has been debated in the House. It has been studied at committee. More than 20 witnesses have appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Parliament has now spent more than 30 hours debating and studying this legislation.

That is what we call serious scrutiny. That is responsible legislative review, yet despite all of that work, the bill remains stalled, not because Canadians are uncertain about confronting hate and not because the legislation has not been studied, but because procedural tactics have been used to delay the moment when Parliament must make a decision.

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I want to speak plainly today. Members of the House are free to oppose legislation. They are free to disagree with provisions. They are free to vote against a clause. They are free to vote against the amendment, and they are free to vote against the entire bill. That is democracy, but democracy also requires that Parliament eventually vote. It cannot function if legislation can be delayed indefinitely through procedural manoeuvres. Members of the opposition have had months to present their arguments. They have had hours and hours and hours to debate. They have had the opportunity to propose amendments throughout many, many months. What they do not have is the right to stall Parliament indefinitely, because while this chamber debates procedure, something else is happening outside these walls.

Communities across Canada are facing rising hate and intimidation. We see it in the data. We see it in police reports, and we see it on the news. Just recently, shots were fired at a synagogue in the greater Toronto area. Shots were fired at a place of worship, a place where people gather and pray, a place where families bring children, a place where Canadians should feel free and protected. That incident is not isolated. Jewish communities have reported rising threats. Mosques have reported rising threats and facing intimidation, and many other religious institutions have been subjected to hate crimes. Community centres from all backgrounds have been targeted, and hateful symbols have appeared outside schools and cultural institutions.

These are not theoretical concerns. They are real events affecting real people. When Canadians see incidents like this, they expect Parliament to respond with seriousness and efficiency. They expect Parliament to strengthen protections, and they expect Parliament to act.

Bill C-9 is part of that response. The legislation does three simple things. First, it creates an offence to prevent people from blocking or intimidating others who are trying to enter places like synagogues, mosques, churches, schools, community centres and any other places of worship. Second, it creates a stand-alone, hate-motivated offence, so that when crimes are committed because of hatred toward a person's identity, the law recognizes that harm clearly. Third, it addresses the public display of symbols used to promote hatred and intimidate communities.

These are practical measures. They are targeted measures, and they respond directly to what communities have been asking Parliament to address. The legislation before us is only eight pages long, eight pages, yet Parliament has now spent more than 30 hours studying it. Witnesses have testified. Experts have spoken. Communities have shared their experiences. Amendments have been debated. That is thorough scrutiny by any reasonable standard, yet the delays continue.

• (1220)

Much of the opposition's argument has focused on the removal of the religious exemption provision in the Criminal Code. Let us examine that argument carefully. Freedom of religion in Canada is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That protection is fundamental. It is one of the cornerstones of our constitutional system, and it is not changing. Courts in Canada have repeatedly confirmed that hate propaganda offences require an ex-

tremely high legal threshold. That threshold requires proof that someone wilfully promoted hatred against an identifiable group. Reading scripture does not meet that threshold. Teaching religious doctrine does not meet that threshold. Practising one's faith does not meet that threshold. Those freedoms remain fully protected.

In fact, the religious exemption provisions that have become the focus of this debate have never been relied upon in a prosecution, not once. The protection for religious expression in Canada comes from the charter and from the high legal threshold built into the Criminal Code of Canada. Nevertheless, concerns were raised, and when those concerns were raised, Parliament responded responsibly. A "for greater certainty" clause was introduced to explicitly confirm that peaceful religious expression, including sermons, teachings and discussion of scripture, would never be criminalized under this legislation. That clarification was introduced in good faith. It addressed the concern directly, and it reaffirmed what the charter already guarantees, but even after the clarification, the delay continued.

Canadians watching this debate might reasonably ask a simple question. If the Charter protects religious freedom, if the courts already set a very high threshold, and if the bill now contains an explicit clarification protecting religious expression, then why does the delay continue? That is a question members of the opposition should answer, because Canadians expect Parliament to deal honestly with the facts, and the facts are clear: Freedom of religion is protected, and peaceful religious expression is protected.

This legislation targets something entirely different. It targets intimidation. It targets harassment. It targets the deliberate promotion of hatred. When people block the entrance to a synagogue, to a mosque or to any other place of worship to frighten worshippers, that is intimidation. When people surround a mosque, shouting threats, that is intimidation. When hateful symbols are displayed outside synagogues, schools or community centres to frighten families, that is intimidation. Canadians are asking Parliament to respond to that intimidation.

There is another consequence to this ongoing delay that we must acknowledge. Parliament's time is not unlimited. Every hour spent delaying one bill is an hour that cannot be spent advancing other legislation, including legislation addressing public safety, legislation addressing justice reform and legislation addressing economic issues that Canadians expect Parliament to address. When procedural tactics are used to stall legislation indefinitely, they slow the entire work of Parliament. That is not responsible opposition.

Responsible opposition means debating legislation seriously. Responsible opposition means proposing amendments. Responsible opposition means voting according to one's principles. What it does not mean is preventing Parliament from reaching a decision.

The motion before us today is straightforward. It would not eliminate debate. Debate has already happened for hours and hours and months and months, with more than 30 hours of it just in committee. What this motion would do is ensure that the committee could complete its work and that the House could finally vote on Bill C-9. Every member of the House would then have the opportunity to make their position clear. Those who support confronting hatred would vote for the legislation. Those who oppose would vote against it. That is how democracy functions. Canadians are watching this debate.

• (1225)

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard this song before: “Trust us that the invocation of the Emergencies Act declaration is charter-compliant. Just trust us.” The then minister of justice, David Lametti, told Justice Rouleau that he could not give him his legal opinion, but just to trust him that it was charter-compliant. We all know now that it was not.

Now we are hearing the same song and dance from the Liberal Party: “Trust us, religious groups. Trust us, Canadians. Your charter rights are still protected.”

The question is very simple: Why should Canadians believe you now?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Again, I will remind members to address their comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle.

Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, Canadians should believe us because there has been an increase in hate crimes that we cannot imagine. There have been 67% more religious incidents than in 2022. Those based on sexual orientation have increased by 69%.

How could we not pass this legislation? How could we not try to protect Canadians? How could we not attend to the safety of our citizens?

There is an increase in hate crime. Everybody knows that there are statistics supporting this, so yes, it is crucial that we pass this bill as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have a number of examples where preachers called for the death of Jews and Christians and got away with it without facing prosecution.

The same thing happened with Adil Charkaoui in 2024. The director of criminal and penal prosecutions was unable to prosecute him, claiming insufficient evidence under the Criminal Code. Even the vice-president of the Quebec branch of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs said that this decision pointed to gaps in the current Canadian legal framework, and that is what the current bill will fix.

I think the bill before us will not prohibit reading biblical passages, but it will prohibit using them to make death threats or promote hatred.

• (1230)

Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague, who explained the situation in a sensitive and intelligent way. I appreci-

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ate everything he just explained. It is really important to address this type of issue, otherwise hatred will continue.

People can say anything, whatever they want. They can incite discrimination, defamation or hatred based on beliefs or what others wear as symbols. This type of bill will help us introduce stricter sentences for this type of crime.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I am a Quebecker. My colleague is a Quebecker. I am a practising Catholic, and I know just how important this bill is, because there are threats against people who practise their faith.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague how obstruction threatens religious groups who wish to practise their faith freely.

Anju Dhillon: Mr. Speaker, every day that this bill is delayed, lives are lost and safety is compromised. Threats and hatred, however, are not abating. As the days go by, we see them increasing.

We must respond to this. It is our responsibility as legislators. It is our responsibility as elected officials. It is our responsibility in Parliament to pass this kind of legislation to protect citizens and ensure that hatred does not continue to spread in this way.

[*English*]

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Bill C-9 did not start out as a debate about religious freedom. It was presented as a modernization measure, a technical reform that we were told would strengthen protections against hatred while ensuring that Canada remained a country defined by tolerance, pluralism and mutual respect. That, at least, was the stated objective when the bill first came to Parliament, yet the legislation has changed in a way that few Canadians anticipated. Even fewer were properly consulted.

During committee, the Liberal government, supported by the Bloc, voted to remove from the Criminal Code a safeguard that has existed for decades, a provision that recognizes that the expression of sincerely held religious beliefs, when offered in good faith, does not constitute criminal hate speech.

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This safeguard was not accidental wording inserted into the law without deep reflection. It represents Parliament's understanding that Canada is home to citizens whose deepest convictions are shaped by many different faith traditions, stretching back centuries. These are traditions that speak openly about morality, human dignity, family life and social responsibility, in ways that may at times challenge prevailing cultural opinion. In acknowledging this reality, the Criminal Code drew an important distinction that disagreement, even profound disagreement, must never be confused with criminal intent.

When religious communities across Canada began raising concerns about the removal of this safeguard, and these were concerns voiced by Jewish congregations, Christian churches, Muslim organizations, Sikh gurdwaras, Hindu temples and Buddhist communities, the government responded by introducing what it described as clarifying language to assure Canadians that nothing essential had changed and that religious expression would remain protected under the bill. However, when we take a closer look at this so-called clarification, a fundamental question arises. If religious expression truly remains protected, if sermons, scripture reading, theological teaching and moral discussions are still lawful, then why remove the explicit protection that guaranteed that certainty in the Criminal Code in the first place?

For decades, the Criminal Code contained something very concrete, a good-faith religious defence that recognized that sincerely held religious teachings, expressed honestly and without the intent to promote hatred or violence, fell outside criminal sanction. That clarity mattered not only because it guided prosecutors when deciding whether charges were appropriate, but also because it reassured ordinary Canadians that the practice of their faith, expressed peacefully and in good conscience, would not suddenly expose them to criminal charges, yet the government now proposes to replace that certainty with verbal reassurances alone, asking Canadians simply to trust that their freedom remains secure, even as the explicit protection that guaranteed them is removed from the law. However, verbal reassurance is not the same thing as protection, so I rise today with a sober sense of duty because the responsibility now falls to the members of the House to defend the religious freedom of Canadians.

Over the past weeks and months, thousands of Canadians, pastors, rabbis, imams, community leaders and ordinary citizens, have taken the time to call and write their members of Parliament, expressing deep concern about this bill and asking that it not proceed in its current form. Despite those voices, the government has chosen to press ahead, even shutting down debate in an ironic twist of government censorship of free speech.

If the government were confident that Bill C-9 represented sound legislation capable of withstanding careful examination, it would welcome debate and allow amendments to be discussed openly. It would permit members of Parliament to do the work Canadians sent them here to do, to examine legislation thoughtfully before it becomes law. Instead, the government that insists Bill C-9 is necessary to regulate harmful speech is now censoring debate on its own censorship bill.

Religious freedom holds a unique place among our democratic liberties because it speaks not simply to opinion but to belief, to the

deeply held convictions through which people understand duty, morality and the meaning of their lives. History shows us again and again that, when governments attempt to control belief, even claiming to preserve harmony or protect the public good, the result is rarely unity and almost never justice. Over centuries, societies have learned that peace in diverse countries is not achieved by forcing everyone to agree but by allowing people with very different beliefs to live together without fear that the state will dictate what they must believe.

● (1235)

History gives us a lot of examples of what happens when governments try to control belief. A friend of mine recently shared the story of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth guru of the Sikh faith. In the 17th century, during a time of increasing religious pressure in Mughal India, Hindu families from Kashmir were being forced to abandon their faith and convert under the authority of the state. Desperate to preserve their freedom, they travelled long distances seeking someone who would defend their right to follow their beliefs. They turned to Guru Tegh Bahadur, a Sikh spiritual leader, because they believed he understood something essential, which is that freedom of conscience belongs to every person.

Guru Tegh Bahadur could have chosen silence and avoided a confrontation with imperial power, yet he understood that, once a government claims the authority to dictate the beliefs of one community, the freedom of everyone becomes vulnerable. Knowing that risk, he refused demands that he convert or force others to convert. For taking that stand in defence of the right of a faith community to exist, he was imprisoned and ultimately executed in Delhi in 1675.

For this reason, he is remembered in Sikh tradition as the shield of India, because his sacrifice protected the freedom of others. His life reminds us of a truth that reaches across centuries and cultures, which is that religious liberty cannot be divided. When it is taken from one group, it eventually becomes fragile for everyone. That lesson echoes throughout history, because societies thrive when people are free to speak openly about their convictions, even when those convictions challenge the thinking of the day. Many ideas we now celebrate as moral progress began as minority voices standing against the consensus of their time.

I want to be very clear about why I raise this example. The point is simple, and it is that moral arguments, including those shaped by faith, have always been a part of public life, and history shows that silencing those voices cost society dearly. Few stories show this more clearly than the life of William Wilberforce.

At the height of the British Empire, the transatlantic slave trade was deeply embedded in the global economy, with powerful institutions defending it and many believing Britain's prosperity depended upon it. To oppose slavery at that time was widely seen as extreme, yet Wilberforce, guided by his Christian faith, believed moral responsibility required action. He began a decades-long struggle in Parliament, standing year after year to argue for abolition, all while facing defeat, ridicule and warnings that his efforts threatened Britain's economy. For nearly 20 years, his efforts failed, but perseverance eventually prevailed when Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807.

What began as an unpopular moral conviction ultimately reshaped law and history. The lesson is clearly that freedom of expression does not exist simply to protect views that are comfortable or widely accepted, but to protect the voices that challenge the thinking of the moment. The lesson is not that every moral argument wins, but that a free society must allow those arguments to be made.

Canada's success as a pluralistic society rests on that principle. People came here seeking the freedom to live according to conscience, bringing different languages, cultures and faith traditions, which could exist side by side because the law did not demand ideological conformity. Faith communities helped build our country precisely because they were free. Long before government programs existed, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and gurdwaras helped establish hospitals, schools, food banks, shelters and charitable organizations that continue to serve Canadians today.

Removing religious safeguards from the Criminal Code does not strengthen our democracy; it weakens the legal clarity that allows this pluralism to flourish. Canadian courts have already made it clear that violence, threats and incitement to harm are not protected speech and never have been, which is why these actions are already criminal offences. What the good-faith defence protects is something very different. It is the right of Canadians to express sincerely held beliefs without fear that disagreement itself might one day become a criminal matter.

Canada has never required uniformity of belief to maintain peace. Our strength has always rested on freedom under law and the ability of people with very different convictions to live together without coercion. If the government truly believes religious expression remains protected, then leaving the safeguard in place should present no difficulty because its presence harms no one, while its removal creates uncertainty for many Canadians.

A confident democracy does not silence debate and certainly does not use closure motions to rush through legislation that touches on the freedoms of conscience and expression. In a free country, we respond to ideas we disagree with through debate, persuasion and democratic engagement, not through criminal law and shutting down Parliament to prevent discussion.

Canadians deserve clarity in their law, confidence in their freedoms and a Parliament willing to defend both.

Government Orders

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it shameful that the Conservatives are calling this a censorship bill. Hatred is real in our communities. In Brome—Missisquoi, I have constituents who have been subjected to acts that I consider to be highly reprehensible.

Do the Conservatives believe it is acceptable to threaten synagogues, threaten Arabs, target LGBTQ people simply because of who they are, wave a Nazi flag, or call for the extermination of women and racialized Canadians?

[*English*]

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue before us, it is not about supporting protections against hatred. We all support protections against hatred.

However, on whether the government should remove a safeguard that has protected the good-faith expression of religious beliefs for decades, the question Canadians are asking is very simple: If religious expression is already protected, why remove the protection that made it clear in the Criminal Code in the first place? That is the concern faith communities across the country are having, and they have been raising it. That is the concern Parliament should be addressing.

[*Translation*]

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, so far, several members of my caucus have asked Conservative members the same question, but we have not received an answer. The Conservatives are saying that existing laws are already sufficient to address these issues.

However, here is a specific example. In October 2024, Adil Charkaoui called for the death of Jews in a prayer during a protest. It was an invitation to kill. The director of criminal and penal prosecutions said that he could not prosecute him because he was limited in the options available to him.

Last weekend, people were calling for jihad in Montreal. Does my colleague think it is acceptable that threats of violence and calls for violence like that are constantly being made and that the police can do nothing about it because of issues in the Criminal Code?

Government Orders

• (1245)

[English]

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, as we have repeated many times, the tools are there, and they have not been used correctly. What I have been hearing from Canadians is not political theatre, but genuine concern. Over the past weeks, thousands of people, rabbis, pastors, imams and ordinary citizens, have taken the time to write and call their members of Parliament because they fear the good-faith expression of their beliefs could someday be treated as a criminal matter. When so many Canadians raise that concern, Parliament's responsibility is not to dismiss them or rush the bill through, but to ensure that their fundamental freedoms remain clearly protected in law.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the proposal to remove the religious defence was not studied at all at committee. Witnesses made passing reference to it, but that amendment was not proposed until after witness testimony was done. Unfortunately, the lack of study is demonstrated by the complete disinterest of Liberals, in particular, to engage with the substance of the bill and some of the misunderstandings about the legislation.

For example, the religious defence applies to hate speech, not to incitement to violence. The Bloc claim that the religious defence had something to do with an issue of incitement to violence not being charged in Quebec is completely legally incorrect because the religious defence does not apply to incitement to violence. What the Quebec prosecution service said in that case was that, in its view, there was a lack of clarity around the identifiable group, which is why it did not lay a charge, but it had absolutely nothing to do with the religious defence, as the religious defence does not apply to incitement.

Why is there so much ignorance from the other parties on the basic provision of the bill when it has not been properly studied at committee?

Tamara Jansen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague gave a wonderful explanation. The thing that really strikes me the most is that the government told Canadians not to worry because it just added in a clarification clause, yet when we read that clause, it simply says that speech is allowed as long as it is not hate speech. That is not really a clarification. It is just circular reasoning.

The previous safeguard actually drew a line that Canadians could understand, which is that sincerely held religious teaching expressed in good faith was not criminal. Removing that clarity while claiming nothing has changed is exactly why so many Canadians remain concerned.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to first acknowledge our Jewish communities that have been victims of recent shootings in Toronto taking place at synagogues. The rise in anti-Semitism has only worsened since the attacks on October 7. These are attacks that are already illegal and that nothing in Bill C-9 would have prevented from occurring. That is why I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important discussion on Bill C-9 and, more specifically, the deal made by the Liberals and the Bloc to eliminate Criminal Code safeguards for

freedom of expression and freedom of religion. They are now imposing closure on that very important debate.

Over the past 17 years that I have served as a member of Parliament, there have been many issues that have caused deep concern for constituents. Using the measurement of the volume of emails that I receive on any given issue, I can attest that some issues appear to be greater than others. Whether I agree with the opinions expressed in the emails or not, I recognize that constituents have demonstrated that they are deeply passionate enough about an issue to go the extra mile to communicate their opinion to their member of Parliament.

With that context, I want to put on the record that the Bloc amendment to Bill C-9 is a genuinely huge and alarming issue.

My inbox has been flooded with emails from constituents, the likes of which are equal in number only to the number of emails I received when the Liberal government invoked the Emergencies Act in February 2022. Key among constituents' concerns with the amendment is that with the new definition of hate in Bill C-9 and the removal of the religious defence, it would be easier for people to be prosecuted over religious expression. The ambiguity the bill would create about where the line should be drawn on hate speech would have a chilling effect on discussions about contented issues.

The following are just a couple of excerpts from emails I have received. Here is one: "As recently as last week and even this morning I have been hearing some troubling news about an amendment to Bill C-9 that does not seem to be good news for our community of faith or our country. As a pastor in a church of the Sask Valley, I think we should raise our voice of disapproval to the amendment that could happen very soon."

Here is another: "I am writing because I've heard the Justice Committee is reviewing Bill C-9 and may be asked to consider amending the bill to remove the good faith religious belief defense from section 319(3) of the Criminal Code. This defense isn't overused or misused. It's an important protection for minority religious communities like the one I belong to. Removing this defense would marginalize religious Canadians and send the message that their beliefs are less protected in Canada. Please don't allow Bill C-9 to be changed to remove this defense. Thank you for standing against this attempt to restrict our religious freedoms."

By removing the religious defence and removing Attorney General consent for laying a hate speech charge, the Liberals would be sending a signal to the courts, law enforcement and activist groups that religious teaching is fair game for criminal prosecution. To be clear, the issue is not whether faith leaders should be free to spread hate but rather how hate is defined and how the new law would be applied.

Government Orders

Calls to incite hatred or violence, whether cloaked in religion or not, are already illegal and not subject to the religious defence that Bill C-9 proposes to remove. The religious defence has never shielded hate or incitement to violence but has served as an essential safeguard for Canadians of all religious traditions, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and others, who seek to express their sincerely held beliefs in peaceful, responsible ways.

I believe that the removal of the defence would represent a serious shift in the relationship between the state and freedom of religion in Canada. Its removal would risk chilling legitimate religious expression, creating legal uncertainty for faith communities, empowering subjective or inconsistent enforcement and undermining confidence in Canada's commitment to pluralism and freedom.

• (1250)

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of conscience and religion, as well as freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression. These guarantees were enshrined in law to ensure that Canadians can live out their beliefs even when those beliefs are unpopular or run counter to cultural trends.

Respecting diverse beliefs and protecting freedoms is essential to any healthy democracy, and it is something we take pride in here in Canada. The proposed change to Bill C-9 risks eroding that foundation. While it is not surprising that this amendment was put forward by the Bloc, what is shocking is that the Liberal Party of Canada has acceded to this amendment that would completely undermine the charter. Perhaps this is why so many Canadians are taken aback. More than an assault on specific religions that have sacred texts, which some secularists might find offensive, the Bloc amendment to Bill C-9 is an assault on the idea of what it means to be a free country.

Let us be clear: The right of freedom to expression and freedom of religion is connected to the freedom of what someone can think. The government has laws already in existence that would allow it to prosecute hate crimes, and blaming our laws for why politicians from the Liberal Party have left our judges and police officers without the public backing to enforce those laws that exist is wrong.

Despite the government's attempt to gloss over this amendment, there is no way the amendment would be anything but a stripping away of the rights of Canadians. The Supreme Court has recognized the religious defence as necessary to keep Canada's hate speech laws constitutional. When it made this ruling, the highest court in Canada understood how crucial freedom of expression and freedom of religion are.

The good-faith religious defence protects minorities and those with sincerely held religious beliefs. Is the government signalling to Canadians that it does not believe they function in good faith? We are a nation built upon peace, order and good governance. I do not believe that as parliamentarians we have the right to ask that Canadians assume we govern in good faith, while removing provisions that protect their freedoms under the assumption that Canadians themselves do not operate in good faith.

While Liberals continue to insist that their new bill is needed to protect religious Canadians from hate, removing the religious free-

dom safeguard from the Criminal Code would not make them safer. It would not protect anyone, least among them people of faith, from hate. Instead, it would expose them to criminal prosecution for the simple act of quoting from their own sacred texts.

I would not be speaking today if I did not feel truly concerned by the monumental change this amendment would have in Canadian society. I know it. Canadians know it. Perhaps most concerning is that the government knows it but does not appear to care.

Despite all this, Conservatives asked the government to split Bill C-9 to quickly move through provisions and protections for places of worship, protections for cultural centres and offences related to intimidation. The Liberals have instead chosen to shut down debate on such a significant change to the Criminal Code in its removal of religious protections. At a time when Canada should be standing shoulder to shoulder, united, the Liberals have chosen to prioritize passing such a divisive piece of legislation.

• (1255)

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member focused a great deal on a defence that has never once successfully been used in the history of Canada, and she talked about the monumental change this would make to the criminal law when, again, it is a defence that has never once been successfully used. The only people who could avail themselves of this defence are those who are charged with wilfully promoting hate, which is the very high standard the Supreme Court set in the Keegstra decision.

Could the hon. member elucidate for the House with an exact example of where the defence could properly and successfully be used? Give me an example of somebody who is charged who you think should be able to use this defence, and how it would be used.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Again I would remind members to address their comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I would simply tell my hon. colleague to ask that question to his colleague who spoke at the justice committee and gave his opinion on what should happen in such a case as the member is speaking about.

I would add that the government's motion is truly not about protecting places of worship. It is about shutting down debate to force through a controversial amendment and, which the member knows, to remove the religious defence in the Criminal Code. It is an amendment that was not in the original bill.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the amendment is based on the Criminal Code's prohibition against promoting hatred, which is a criminal offence.

There have been situations, like that of imam Charkaoui, for example, who promoted hatred against the Jewish people. He was not prosecuted because of the religious exemption. Eta Yudin, vice-president of the Quebec chapter of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, said that this demonstrates clear shortcomings in the Criminal Code, meaning that, in its current form, the legislation is incapable of protecting the public against hate speech. That explains the call for change that we are making today.

What does it mean to defend freedom? Yes, everyone must be able to practise their religion and have their own ideas, even if it causes discomfort, but collectively, we must set boundaries. Prohibiting the promotion of hatred is one guideline, and yet there is a religious exemption.

Why does the hon. member want to defend this tooth and nail?

• (1300)

[English]

Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I will refer back to the comments I made in my speech on this very issue. The Supreme Court, the highest court in Canada, has recognized that the religious defence is necessary to keep Canada's hate speech laws constitutional. When it made this ruling, it understood how crucial freedom of expression and freedom of religion are.

I will end by saying that we already have laws in the Criminal Code that allow people to be prosecuted for inciting others to violence on the basis of hate.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals seem to be quite blind to the impact their legislation would have on freedom of belief, expression and religion. Can the member share whether she agrees that it is not so much blindness but that they really do not care about these rights and would prefer censorship rather than Canadians' having different perspectives, for whatever agenda or ideology they are propagating?

Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I was clear in my speech that what is deeply concerning to me, and perhaps to my colleagues on this side of the House and to the individuals I represent back home in Saskatchewan, is that the government does not seem to care about the implications for our country or our citizens who want to practise their faith. This would have an impact on them that would not be easily unwound.

They are censoring a censorship bill by imposing closure on this debate. I believe that speaks for itself.

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Burnaby Central.

I am very pleased to address the House today with respect to the combatting hate act, which is a law that would protect all Canadians better.

However, we need to talk about how we got to the combatting hate act. As a member of the Jewish community of Canada, I would have to start with the fact that since October 7, 2023, the Jewish community of Canada has faced an increasing barrage of hate. It goes up and it goes down, but the fact is that one group that represents 1.2% of the Canadian population faces 70% of religion-based hate crimes. It is a fact that this group has had its synagogues shot at three times in the last week. It is a fact that this group has had schools shot at. It is a fact that this group has had people standing outside its community centres, its schools and its synagogues, yelling vile chants, blaming the people in the building for what is happening across the world and telling the people in the building they should go back to Poland, when many of us have been in this country for six and seven generations or more. We have been here since the beginning of this country. We are as Canadian as anyone else, and the idea that we should be told to go back to somewhere else is beyond belief and beyond any reasonable comment.

Therefore, when we hear outside of our synagogues and schools chants that call for our destruction and call for our demise, that is not okay. When people say “globalize the intifada”, which is a call by Hamas to call for the destruction of the Jewish people, not only in Israel but across the world, that is not okay.

We got to this place in a way that was really, really bad. We saw hate in this country going way up, against Jews but against other groups as well. We have had shootings at a mosque in Quebec City. We have had a couple of Muslims killed in London, Ontario. We have had Christian churches burned across this country. We have had protests, unfair ones, outside of gurdwaras and temples. This law is meant to protect.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Last year, witnesses appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. One of the committee members is the MP for Rivière-du-Nord. Conservative Party MPs were there too. We studied anti-Semitism in Canada to figure out what we should do to improve our laws and prevent hatred in our country. We made recommendations. I will read four of the committee's recommendations, which are in Bill C-9.

[English]

Recommendation 10 is “That the federal Parliament consider creating a new intimidation offence under the Criminal Code to more clearly and directly protect entrance to and exit from community buildings such as schools, places of worship and community centers, in addition to existing offences that may apply in situations where such buildings are being blocked.”

Government Orders

Recommendation 15 is “That the Government of Canada consider removing the requirement to obtain the consent of the provincial Attorney General in order to prosecute certain hate crimes.” At the committee, we have agreed to drop that, but that was in the bill, and it was recommended by the committee.

Recommendation 16 is “That the Government of Canada take steps to ban the display of symbols of terrorist organizations that are listed under the Criminal Code.” That is in the bill.

Recommendation 17 is “That the Government of Canada work with police forces across the country to develop a standardized definition of 'hate crime'”. That standardized definition of hate is in the bill, and we have agreed with our colleagues in both other parties to amend the bill to ensure that the definition is in line with Keegstra.

As a result of those recommendations, Jewish organizations across the country, including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the Alliance of Canadians Combatting Antisemitism, B'nai Brith Canada, Canadian Women Against Antisemitism and the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, have put out joint statements calling on the House and members of Parliament to work together to pass this bill.

I would also note that the issue is even more pressing, given the situation last weekend with the three shootings at synagogues in Toronto. There was a press conference on Sunday that was attended by representatives of both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, as well as members of the Ontario government, the Toronto city government and police forces of different jurisdictions. There was a commitment made by everybody to a non-partisan approach to tackling the horrible anti-Semitism being faced by Canadian Jews today.

Every Canadian has a right to feel safe and be safe in Canada, and that includes the Jewish community. I was hoping, and I very much had hoped, that type of press conference would convince my colleagues across the aisle to support the bill.

This bill is the number one thing that has been asked for by the Jewish community in order to confront anti-Semitism. It has all of the elements there, so it is a bit disappointing today to hear that my colleagues across the aisle are still not prepared to support the bill.

I want to say that the arguments they are making about religious freedom are not correct. I will read the words of Joseph Neuberger, who is a criminal lawyer with Neuberger and Partners LLP, the chair of the Canadian Jewish Law Association and also a Conservative Party supporter, as he declares in this article. He says:

Bill C-9 doesn't threaten religious freedom. It draws a necessary line.

Bill C-9 does not regulate belief, worship, sermons or religious teaching. It does not criminalize disagreement or political debate.

Claims that Bill C-9, The Combatting Hate Act, threatens religious freedoms in Canada are false. They are not supported by the bill itself, by the Constitution, or by decades of court decisions.

More than that, the claim that Bill C-9 undermines religious freedom is not a matter of interpretation or reasonable disagreement—it is misinformation. Religious freedom is explicitly protected by section 2(a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and has been repeatedly affirmed by Canadian courts as a core constitutional guarantee.

Nothing in Bill C-9 amends, limits or conditions that protection. The bill does not interfere with worship, belief, religious teaching, sermons, or doctrine. To suggest otherwise is to assert a legal effect that simply does not exist.

I agree entirely with what Mr. Neuberger said. We are removing a defence that has not once been successfully used in Canadian history.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

This defence is used only by people charged with promoting hatred. The threshold is very high. This is saying that someone who goes out in public to promote hatred against people in this country is charged at that point, and it is at that point that this defence becomes available. This defence can be invoked only after an individual has been charged with promoting hatred in Canada, and the threshold is very high.

[*English*]

I will end with the following: I am very much hoping that my colleagues opposite will reconsider. Right now at the justice committee, after hours and hours of Conservative filibustering, we are studying a subamendment by a Conservative member that would essentially mean that we could never have anyone charged with wilful promotion of hate in Canada. I think most of the members of the opposition party would be shocked if they saw what that amendment says. I really hope that people will reconsider and we can all pass the bill.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, coming from the airport, I had the cab driver tell me, unsolicited, that he wanted Israel wiped off the map, and I have to assume Jews also.

What we are seeing in Canada is an 800% increase in hate speech. This craziness has happened under the Liberal watch in every respect. An Iranian dissident I knew was killed in Vancouver last month. This is going on.

The Liberals have not been enforcing the laws that are there, so they come up with this bill that censors religious speech. I wonder if the member could speak to the fact that the Conservatives wanted to split the bill to keep the crime pieces in and move out the censorship aspect.

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, the Parliament of Canada writes the Criminal Code. The enforcement of the Criminal Code is provincial, and most of that is carried out by municipal police. The idea that the federal government can interfere with enforcement, which is a provincial jurisdiction, when it is mostly carried out by municipal police that we do not hire or fire, is a fantasy.

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What we can do is what the Jewish organizations across this country have asked us to do, which is to improve the Criminal Code to give police more tools to prosecute people who are creating hate in this country. That was done in consultation with police groups across the country. I cited hearings of police officers from Toronto, Montreal and other places, who told us that they wanted the tools in this bill.

We are doing what we are supposed to do. We are rewriting the Criminal Code to make things better for police to enforce.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9 is designed to prevent religious texts from being used to incite hatred, but by no means does it prohibit anyone from reading or referring to religious texts.

Could my colleague elaborate on that?

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that absolutely nothing in Bill C-9 will prevent anyone from reading or promoting religious texts in a church, synagogue, mosque or any other place of worship. It contains absolutely nothing to that effect. For even greater certainty, considering the proliferation of disinformation, we also decided to state that point unequivocally.

The Liberal members came to an agreement with the member for Rivière-du-Nord, and hopefully with the Conservative members as well, to include a statement in Bill C-9 that reading any sacred text is allowed.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of misinformation with respect to Bill C-9. When I look at Bill C-9, I see it as a very positive piece of legislation dealing with hate crime, but let us be very clear. There is nothing that is taking place in the Sikh gurdwaras, Christian churches, mosques or synagogues that would be impacted by the passage of Bill C-9. Bill C-9 is there to protect.

I appreciate what the member has been saying, and I am wondering if he could provide his personal assurance, given his background, as to why people of faith have nothing to worry about in terms of restricting religions, in particular with the Canadian Charter of Rights.

• (1315)

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, freedom of religion and freedom of expression are guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In fact, when I was mayor of Côte Saint-Luc, I held a rally for religious freedom. I very much believe in religious freedom. There is nothing in the bill that would stop anyone from preaching, reciting, reading or doing anything that they are doing today. This defence has never been successfully used in Canadian history, and it is used only if someone is charged with wilfully promoting hate, which no good-faith religious person in this country should or would ever do.

Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the motion before the House because the issue at the centre of this debate is not procedural tactics. It is the safety and dignity of Canadians.

Bill C-9, the combatting hate act, was introduced by the Minister of Justice on September 19, 2025. It was then referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights shortly thereafter. Since that time, Parliament has debated the bill, the committee has studied it, witnesses have testified, and amendments have been proposed. The legislation has been examined in detail. In total, Parliament has now spent more than 30 hours debating and studying Bill C-9.

This is serious scrutiny. This is how Parliament is supposed to work. However, scrutiny must eventually lead to a decision. This motion simply ensures that the House can complete its work and that Canadians will finally see Parliament vote on legislation designed to confront hate and intimidation in our communities.

The core purpose of Bill C-9 is straightforward: to strengthen Canada's response to hate-motivated intimidation and violence. It would do this in three practical ways. First, it would create offences that prevent individuals from blocking or intimidating people who are trying to enter places like synagogues, mosques, churches, schools and community centres. Second, it would create a stand-alone hate-motivated offence so that when crimes are committed because of hatred toward somebody's identity, the law would recognize the harm clearly. Third, it would address the public display of hate symbols used to promote hatred and intimidate communities.

These are not abstract problems. They are real experiences that communities across Canada have been facing. We have seen synagogues targeted, mosques threatened and cultural centres vandalized. We have seen people harassed simply for walking into places that represent their identity and community.

We have seen something else as well. We have seen hate directed at 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians increase in recent years. As an openly gay member of Parliament, I know personally that hatred is not an abstract concept. It is not something that exists only in statistics or reports. It is something that people experience in their daily lives. It can appear in threats, as intimidation and sometimes in the form of people showing up outside places where communities gather to try to send a message that certain people do not belong.

Canada is not that kind of country. Canada is a country where everyone should be able to live openly and safely. It should not matter whether somebody is Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Hindu or atheist. It should not matter whether somebody is Black, indigenous, Asian or from any other background. It should not matter whether somebody is straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning. In Canada, every person deserves to live free from fear. This is what Bill C-9 is about.

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It is also important to understand how this bill came to be. In December 2024, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights released a report entitled “Heightened Antisemitism in Canada and How to Confront It”. The report contained a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening Canada’s response to hate. Many of those recommendations were reflected directly in Bill C-9. In other words, this legislation is not a surprise. It is the result of a government that listens and actions. It reflects recommendations that were supported by members across party lines. Despite that foundation, the bill has been repeatedly delayed.

Opposition parties play a crucial role in our democracy. Their job is to question legislation, to challenge it and to improve it. In many cases, this is exactly what happens in committee. The job of the opposition is not to stall legislation forever. The job of Parliament is to debate, scrutinize and then decide. Unfortunately, what we have seen in committee over the past several months has not always reflected that principle.

The Conservatives have raised repeated points of order. They have challenged rulings of the chair. They have attempted to reopen settled motions. On one occasion, a Conservative member spoke for two hours about dogs and cats instead of allowing clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to begin. Canadians expect better than that.

• (1320)

They expect Parliament to treat serious issues with seriousness, because while Parliament debates procedure, Canadians are facing real threats. Jewish Canadians have reported intimidation outside synagogues. Muslim Canadians have experienced harassment near mosques. Black Canadians have faced racism in public spaces. Asian Canadians have been targeted by hateful rhetoric. 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians have seen protests and intimidation directed at community spaces. These are not isolated incidents. They are part of a troubling pattern. Communities across Canada have been clear about what they want Parliament to do. They want stronger protections and clear laws. They want Parliament to act. Bill C-9 is part of that response.

Some of the debate around the bill has focused on the removal of the religious exemption provision in the Criminal Code. Let me be very clear about this. Freedom of religion in Canada is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that protection is not changing. Courts in Canada have consistently confirmed that hate propaganda offences require a very high legal threshold. Reading scripture does not meet that threshold. Teaching religious doctrine does not meet that threshold. Practising one’s faith does not meet that threshold. In fact, the religious exemption provision itself has never been relied upon in a prosecution.

Nevertheless, when concerns were raised by faith communities, the government listened. In response, a “for greater certainty” clause was introduced to confirm that peaceful religious expression, including sermons, teachings and discussions of scripture, is not captured by the legislation. This is how Parliament should work. Concerns were raised, clarifications were introduced, and collaboration took place. However, even after that effort, obstruction continued.

The motion before us today is not about limiting debate. Debate has already happened, with more than 30 hours of debate and more than 30 witnesses heard at committee, for a bill that is only eight pages long. This is thorough scrutiny by any reasonable standard. The motion simply ensures that Parliament can complete the work and move forward to a vote. At some point, democracy requires decisions. Communities cannot wait forever while Parliament debates procedure.

The question before us is very simple. Should Parliament be allowed to vote on legislation designed to protect Canadians from hate and intimidation? I believe the answer to the question should be yes. The Canada I believe in is a country where diversity is our strength and where people of every background can live openly and safely. It is a country where no one should feel afraid to walk into their schools, places of worship or community centres. It is a country where Parliament stands up clearly against hatred.

This bill is a meaningful step forward. It sends a message that intimidation, harassment and hate-motivated violence have no place in Canada. After months of debate and delay, it is time for Parliament to do its job. It is time to move forward. It is time to vote.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with my colleague across the aisle on the justice committee.

My question is very targeted and direct. How many times did that particular member and other Liberal members of the justice committee ask questions in support of the removal of this 50-year-old defence?

Wade Chang: Mr. Speaker, freedom of religion is fully protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that protection remains unchanged.

When concerns were raised by faith communities, the government listened and introduced a “for greater certainty” clause to make it clear that peaceful religious expression, such as sermons, teachings and readings of scripture, is not captured by the legislation. Canadians should be able to practise their faith freely, and this bill respects that.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l’Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I can think of a few examples where religious texts have been used to incite hatred.

For example, one time, someone said that Jews were the worst of humanity and should be massacred on judgment day. There have been several such examples. In Quebec, for instance, Adil Charkaoui once prayed for the death of Jews.

The director of criminal and penal prosecutions wanted to lay charges and investigate the matter. However, he decided not to, indicating that the evidence would not be accepted under the current legal framework. People in the Jewish community argued that the legal framework should be reviewed, and that is what happened.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

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[English]

Wade Chang: Mr. Speaker, communities across Canada have been very clear that hate-motivated intimidation is increasing and they want stronger protections. This legislation, Bill C-9, responds to real experiences, from intimidation outside places of worship to harassment targeting cultural and community spaces. Bill C-9 would strengthen the law in practical ways so that when crimes are motivated by hatred towards somebody's identity, the law would recognize and address the harms clearly.

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for standing in the House and delivering those remarks with bravery. I know he has done a lot of work at the justice committee as well, so I thank him for that.

In his remarks, the member mentioned the amount of time that has been spent at the justice committee debating this particular bill, over 30 hours, I believe he said. He mentioned some of the content that has been presented by opposition members of that committee. I wonder if my colleague could comment on the use of government resources, taxpayer dollars and time that has been spent on this excessive amount of debate at committee and whether or not his constituents see value in those resources being spent that way.

Wade Chang: Mr. Speaker, this legislation has received extensive scrutiny. Parliament has debated it for more than 30 hours. The justice committee heard from more than 30 witnesses and considered amendments.

Debate is important, but at some point, Parliament must also make decisions. Otherwise, meaningful legislation to improve the lives of Canadians would never be able to make an impact. Canadians expect us to examine legislation seriously and then vote on it. That is what this motion allows the House to do.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am struggling with Bill C-9 because I think the definitions are so vague and there is so much discretion that the bill may not survive court challenges later.

Does the hon. member not think it would be better to take the time here to debate it and get the bill right than to see it defeated in the court later?

Wade Chang: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we have spent more than 30 hours on this bill, and there were more than 30 witnesses who testified before committee.

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today on behalf of the residents of Brampton West to oppose the Liberal government's plan to shut down debate on Bill C-9.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Windsor West.

Let us be clear about what this motion would do: It would limit debate, it would limit scrutiny, and it would rush legislation through Parliament. This motion is not about efficiency; it is about control. The government wants to move this bill forward quickly before Canadians fully understand its consequences. That is not collaboration. That is not transparency, and that certainly is not respect for Parliament. This has become the governing style of the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada. When concerns are raised,

they shorten debate. When stakeholders speak up, they limit committee study. When Parliament asks questions, they impose programming motions. That is not confidence in the legislation. That is fear of scrutiny.

This chamber exists for a reason. Parliament is not meant to be a rubber stamp for the executive branch. It is meant to be a place where legislation is tested, improved, challenged and sometimes even stopped if it is flawed. Members of the Conservative Party of Canada believe Parliament exists to test legislation, not rubber-stamp it. We believe members of Parliament must have time to debate, committees must hear witnesses, stakeholders must be heard and Canadians must know that their fundamental rights are protected before laws are passed. That is why this motion is so troubling. Serious concerns have already been raised about the impacts of Bill C-9, especially when it comes to religious freedom and the ability of faith communities to defend their beliefs.

This is not speculation. Across Canada, religious leaders, faith associations and community stakeholders have spoken up. They have asked for clarity. They have asked for protection. They have asked for assurance that the rights of faith communities will not be weakened. Christian leaders have spoken. Jewish organizations have raised concerns. Muslim scholars have expressed caution. Sikh and Hindu associations have asked questions. These communities are not asking for privilege. They are asking for protection. They want to know that people of faith in Canada will still have the right to live according to their beliefs and to defend those beliefs without fear.

I am incredibly proud to represent Brampton West. Brampton is an incredibly diverse city, both culturally and religiously. Brampton is part of the greater Toronto area, which is often referred to as the most culturally diverse area in the world. I am sure other members from the GTA will agree with that title too. In the GTA, it has been said that there are immigrants who come from every single nation on this planet.

My community of Brampton is a great example of Canada's multi-faith mosaic. Every year, thousands of new Canadians immigrating from other countries around the world move to the GTA and to Brampton. They bring with them their unique cultural and religious practices. Canada's multi-faith nature is part of our heritage. In my community, people from all walks of life go to pray at gurdwaras, churches, mosques, mandirs and synagogues. They exist as neighbours and friends. That is Canada and Brampton at their best.

Religious leaders in my community do not seek to advance hate. They seek to advance the value of inclusion, collective responsibility and service to one another as stated by all faiths. For religious leaders, religion is about love, not hate. The right to advance one's belief is not a political preference. It is a constitutional right. It is protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 2 of the charter guarantees freedom of conscience and religion. That means Canadians have the right to practice their faith, the right to teach their beliefs, the right to organized institutions based on those beliefs and the right to defend those beliefs publicly and legally.

● (1330)

Those protections are fundamental to our democracy. When legislation potentially affects those freedoms, Parliament has a duty to proceed carefully. That means more debate, more witnesses and more scrutiny, not less, yet this programming motion does exactly the opposite. It cuts off debate. It limits testimony, and it weakens Parliament's ability to fully examine the implications of this bill.

I want to say something very clearly. When I ran for office and asked Bramptonians for their trust, I made a promise to stand up for fundamental freedoms, to defend the rights of faith communities and to be the champion for religious freedom in this Parliament. That promise did not end on election day. It continues every day I serve in this chamber. As a member of Parliament, I will continue to be a strong voice for religious freedom and Brampton West residents. I will continue to defend the rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and to ensure that the concerns of faith communities are heard in the House.

Faith communities contribute enormously to Canada. Churches run food banks. Religious charities serve the homeless. Faith-based organizations provide shelter, counselling and support for the vulnerable. They strengthen the social fabric of our country. When those communities raise concerns about legislation, Parliament should listen. In a country as diverse as Canada, we must address these concerns. Religious leaders in Brampton and from coast to coast to coast deserve to be heard. Ultimately, listening to them strengthens our democracy. Instead, the government is trying to rush the process. Why the rush? Why limit debate when fundamental freedoms are involved? Why prevent faith leaders from being fully heard?

Strong legislation can withstand scrutiny. Strong legislation listens to Canadians and welcomes debate, but the government seems determined to do the opposite. Under the Prime Minister, the Liberal Party of Canada continues to treat Parliament as an obstacle instead of a democratic safeguard. It prefers speed over scrutiny, control over accountability and process over principle. Canadians deserve better.

The Conservative Party of Canada will not support this approach. We believe religious freedom must always be protected. We believe faith communities deserve a voice in this Parliament and that members of Parliament must have time to examine legislation that could affect fundamental rights. Democracy does not get stronger when debate is shut down. It gets stronger when debate is open, serious and thorough. Therefore, the government should withdraw this programming motion, allow Parliament to do its job, faith leaders to

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testify and Canadians to be heard. When fundamental freedoms are at stake, rushing legislation is not leadership. It is reckless.

For those reasons, I oppose this motion.

● (1335)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the despicable behaviour from the members opposite continues. We have had six months of debate on this topic, and the members opposite are now bemoaning the fact that we are finally calling the question on this. It is ridiculous.

As for the impact on communities in Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, we have seen an unprecedented rise in anti-Semitism. There have been white nationalist rallies in Hamilton. We are seeing an ongoing erosion of reproductive rights for women. These tactics and emulation of the politics from the United States are absolutely reprehensible. Your leader and your deputy leader have called for action on anti-Semitism. Will you follow their example and vote in favour—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I will remind the member to address his comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Brampton West.

Amarjeet Gill: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member opposite listened to the religious leaders, stakeholders, associations or even his own Minister of Justice. He also mentioned he wants to talk to residents regarding Bill C-9. Religious leaders, faith associations and stakeholders across Canada have expressed concern about the lack of clear protection of the religious defence. They want assurance that Canadians of faith can continue to live, teach and defend their beliefs freely under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, basically, if I understand correctly, my colleague believes that the religious exemption should be maintained. In other words, preachers or other individuals could incite hatred and encourage the killing of members of a nation without being prosecuted.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Amarjeet Gill: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talked about what has already been addressed in the Criminal Code. My message is simple. Their voices matter. Faith communities play a vital role in Canada, and their freedom must be protected. I will continue to speak up for them and defend their rights, which are guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last week almost 300 people came out to a Bill C-9 religious freedoms town hall, and in the last half an hour, I have had a flood of emails. Shutting down debate in committee goes against everything that these people want from their members of Parliament. I would like to ask a question of my fellow member. We hear a lot of talk from the other side that we are obstructionists and that we are doing this and doing that. They have done today exactly what they said we are doing.

In my mind, the opposition is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, and I would like the member to comment on the actions taken today. Are they demonstrating a healthy democracy?

Amarjeet Gill: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to meet with constituents and Canadians. We conducted a town hall meeting in Brampton, like he conducted in Hamilton. I am receiving hundreds of emails. I am receiving hundreds of calls asking for the religious defence protection. Something is going wrong on the opposite side. They do not understand what Canadians need, and something needs to be addressed in the House so that Canadians can have the protection they deserve.

I will say one more thing about this. My message is simple. It is that their voices matter. When I ran for office, I promised my constituents that I would be a champion for religious freedom, and I will continue to do that until it comes into effect. We will do our best to protect religious freedom, which plays a vital role in Canadian society.

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin with something that unites every member of the House: Hatred is corrosive, hatred is destructive and hatred has no place in Canada.

Anyone who has served in uniform, as I did for nearly three decades, has seen the damage hatred can inflict on families, on neighbourhoods and on entire communities. Hatred tears at the social fabric. It replaces trust with suspicion. It turns neighbour against neighbour. We cannot afford that in our country, because from the very beginning, our country has tried to stand for something better.

Canada has often been described as the peaceful kingdom, not because we are naive about the world but because we believe in something profound, which is that people of different cultures, different faiths and different traditions can live together in peace. That belief is part of the Canadian character. It is who we are, and it is something worth protecting.

Throughout our history, Canada has tried to stand against bigotry and hatred. We welcomed people fleeing persecution. We opened doors to those seeking freedom and opportunity. Generation after generation of newcomers arrived here with hope in their hearts. They came to work. They came to build. They came to raise families and contribute to this country. They built our railways. They worked our farms. They built our factories and our cities. They opened businesses and strengthened our neighbourhoods, and they brought with them traditions, languages, cultures, faiths and values that added rich and vibrant colours to our Canadian story.

Canada has become stronger because of them, but Canada has also given something precious in return: a fair chance. It offered a

fair chance to work and be rewarded, a fair chance to build a life and a fair chance to belong. In return, Canada expected and we demanded something simple from folks: that those who come here respect the laws of this country, contribute to its success and strengthen the communities they join. That balance of opportunity paired with responsibility has always been at the heart of the Canadian promise. When that balance is respected, communities flourish.

Hatred has never had a rightful place in that story. There must be zero tolerance for hatred in Canada. However, here is the part that does not always fit neatly in a press release or a media scrum: We cannot fight hatred with slogans. We fight it with clear laws, enforceable rules and the courage to apply those laws fairly and consistently, which is where Bill C-9 raises serious concerns.

I speak today not only as a member of Parliament, but as someone who spent nearly three decades serving as a police officer. When Parliament passes laws, it is not politicians who enforce them. It is the officer responding to the call at 2 a.m. in the morning. It is the constable standing in a tense situation, surrounded on all sides, trying to keep the peace while protecting the rights of everyone involved. The men and women doing that job every day understand something very clearly: The laws have to be clear, they have to be practical, and they have to be something that can be applied in confidence in real time.

When legislation becomes vague or uncertain, hesitation sets in. Hesitation is the worst operational environment we can create for a police officer, because when officers hesitate, situations can and do get out of control. Communities lose confidence, and the law itself loses credibility.

After nearly three decades in policing, I learned something very simple about hatred. Most of the time, it does not begin with an act of violence. It begins with something much smaller: a careless word, a rumour, a moment when people stop seeing each other as neighbours. If those moments are not addressed with wisdom and leadership, they grow. That is why this issue demands more than legislation. It demands judgment. It demands restraint. Above all, it demands that we remember the kind of country we are trying to protect.

● (1345)

At this point in the debate, I think it is useful to ask a larger question, not just about the bill but about the kind of country we want to remain. Are we a country that responds to every social tension with another piece of legislation, or are we a country that strengthens the institutions that already protect our freedoms, our laws, our courts, our police services and the shared values that hold our society together?

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Hatred is not simply a legal problem. It is often a social problem, a cultural problem and sometimes an economic problem. While the law has an important role to play, legislation alone cannot rebuild trust between citizens. That work requires leadership. It requires responsibility. It requires policies that strengthen communities rather than divide them.

Canadians are very practical people. They believe in fairness. They believe in responsibility, and they believe in common sense. They expect their Parliament to pass laws that are clear, enforceable and respectful of the freedoms that define the country, and so do police officers. They expect leadership that addresses the real causes of division in our society, not legislation that sounds good in a press release but leaves the deeper problems untouched. Strong communities are not built by government legislation. They are built by strong families, responsible leadership and laws that are applied fairly and consistently to everyone.

We must also be honest about something else. Hatred does not grow in a vacuum. It grows when people feel the system around them is no longer working for them. Over the past number of years, many Canadians have felt the pressures on housing, jobs and public services. These pressures have increased dramatically. They see rents rising. They see young people struggling to find entry-level work. They see communities changing faster than the infrastructure around them can support them. In that environment, frustration grows.

Let us be clear about something. The newcomer who arrives in Canada is not the problem. They came here because Canada invited them. They believed in the promise that the country had to offer. As my mother used to say, every person that comes here has a stomach attached to them. They need to work. They need to eat. They are trying to build a better life for their family.

Over the past decade, immigration levels and international students have expanded dramatically, often without proper planning for housing, infrastructure or labour market needs. In some cases, we have seen institutions treating international students less like students and more like a revenue stream or an ATM machine. When policies are disconnected from realities on the ground, resentment and discontent grows, and the pressure builds. That grievance is often exploited by those who thrive on division. If we are serious about confronting hatred, we must also be serious about addressing the real policy failures that created the conditions in which that hatred grew. It is the consequences of this growth of hatred that are showing up in our communities and eventually on police officers' desks.

Canada has always been a country where different faiths and cultures live side by side. Diversity of belief is not weakness. It is one of our greatest strengths, but diversity only thrives when it rests on shared values, values like respect, responsibility, fairness and love of country. For many Canadians, love of country is part of their faith. Sir John A. Macdonald once reminded us, "Let us be English or let us be French, but...let us be Canadians" first.

That wisdom still speaks to us today. Just yesterday evening, I had the privilege of attending iftar dinner with the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Their message was simple: love for all and hatred for none. That message reflects the very best of Canada. Coex-

isting peacefully is part of the Canadian creed. Standing together is how we protect it. We are a country where different people and different traditions can live together, a country where freedom of conscience is protected. That is the Canada I believe in.

My prayer is for peace in our country. I am proud to be a Canadian, and it is an honour to stand in the House on behalf of the good people of Windsor West. They are magnificent Canadians who work hard, who show resilience and courage, and who continue forward no matter the challenges they face. I am truly grateful to represent them.

More importantly, the people of Windsor and people across this country want us to work together to ensure Canada remains what it has always aspired to be: a country where people live side by side in peace, respect and dignity. In the end, hatred has no place in Canada. Respect does.

• (1350)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite, especially those drawing on his experience in policing and the need for clear laws and enforceable rules. These are exactly the requests that the Hamilton police have made in our consultations about the combatting hate act. There has been a 35% increase in hate-related crimes in Hamilton, primarily against Black, Jewish and LGBTQ individuals. White supremacist rallies with hate symbols are routinely going through municipalities across Canada, including in Hamilton.

My question for the member opposite is this: Will he listen to the requests from law enforcement across the country or the extremist wing of his party?

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, I always listen to my communities and to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Myron Demkiw, the chief of police for Toronto, said that the laws that are needed to address hate already exist. We do not need more laws. We just need the courage to enforce them and the courage to carry on. Instead of being drawn by political pressures, we need to use what we already have in front of us. The laws are there. The Criminal Code has the ability to charge people. Let us show some courage. I was going to use some colourful language, but I will not. Suffice it to say, the laws are already there. Let us use them to pursue the people who are spreading hate and causing hate in our communities.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the last two years, there have been attacks on the Jewish community. There have been 113 Christian churches burned to the ground. There are already laws against these things, and the government has done nothing to enforce the rule of law.

Being a former police officer, I wonder if my colleague could comment on what resources are available if the police are having difficulty enforcing the law.

Statements by Members

● (1355)

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, I am going to take a different tack. Let us say this legislation does pass for some reason. How many cops would be needed to address every call that comes in to say that somebody pissed someone off.

Pardon my language, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: The member promised not to use colourful language. I do not have to consult the big book here to know that is unparliamentary. I would ask him to withdraw the comment.

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the comment.

Let us say, for instance, I am upset about something and 10 other folks here are upset about something and I call the police. Now those police officers have to respond to my complaints with respect to a hate crime. That is going to compound the whole aspect of response times for police agencies when they have much better things to do. They have extortion, homicides, assaults and traffic collisions to deal with, yet they are going to be pulled away from those to address complaints coming into the office based on people's perceptions of hate. Adding hate crime legislation is going to cause a bottleneck that we do not need.

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only say, having listened to that last answer, that the hon. member has not read the bill, because it does not change whatsoever the way one levels a complaint with respect to a hate crime or the definition of a hate crime.

The hon. member talked about enforcement. Can he talk to us about what he believes the role of the federal government is when it comes to police enforcement at a local level? Has he ever had a federal member of Parliament or a federal minister tell him what to do as a police officer? What does he think the federal government is going to do with respect to local law enforcement, which is a provincial jurisdiction, manned by municipal police?

Harb Gill: First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, no politician is allowed to tell a police officer what to do, end of story.

Second, the laws as they exist now are more than sufficient to deal with the issues we are talking about. We do not need additional laws. We need clarity. We need rules of evidence that help enforce these laws, not additional legislation that is going to cause more confusion. A policeman out on the road should not be confused. He needs clear, enforceable laws so he can go to a judge, or a Crown attorney for that matter, and say what has happened, what the elements of the offence are and what charges need to be laid. That is not what is being proposed here. That is why I am opposed to it.

[*Translation*]

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the start of the discussion on this subject and throughout today's debate, all the Conservatives have been loudly proclaiming that they are against hatred. What they are ultimately against, however, is the elimination of the religious exemption.

I am trying to understand why there should be an exemption saying hatred is okay if it is for religious reasons. No one should make

hateful comments, but when it is under the guise of religion, it would be acceptable.

I am trying to understand what would justify placing religions above the law.

[*English*]

Harb Gill: Mr. Speaker, we are a faith-based people across Parliament and across this country. We need to let people practise their faith as they choose. We cannot go out to censor them and tell them to compromise their values and beliefs just because we do not like what they just said or what they just talked about. That is not the Canada we want to live in.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*English*]

IRAN

Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP strongly condemns the U.S. and Israeli bombardment of Iran and the devastating impacts on civilians, including the deaths of children at school. This marks a dangerous and reckless escalation that risks plunging the entire region into catastrophic conflict, which will have global consequences, and there is no end game.

Make no mistake, the oppressive regime in Iran, with its human rights abuses and repression of its own people, is appalling. This includes reports of tens of thousands of killings during recent protests.

The Iranian people deserve democracy, peace and justice, and the future of Iran must be decided by Iranians themselves, but military strikes are not the answer. International law is clear under article 51 of the UN charter and under the International Court of Justice.

New Democrats oppose these attacks and call on the Prime Minister to condemn them, end any complicity through arms exports and make it clear that Canada will not participate in this war.

* * *

ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to believe, but it is that time of year once again. Thanks to an army of volunteers, led by Jay de la Durantaye, Ken Bell, Eileen McAleese, Lea Durocher and the entire team at the Soulanges Irish Society, our community of Vaudreuil will become Irish for the day at the 15th annual St. Patrick's Day parade in Hudson.

This year, our grand marshal, renowned Canadian comedian Derek Seguin, will lead the parade, which will feature our Irish person of the year, Geoffrey Kelley; parade queen Addie Derouin; princesses Caeleigh McDonald and Lisa Wilson; and reviewing officer, Rigaud's mayor, Charles Meunier.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

As always, this is an event not to be missed. On Saturday, March 21 at 1 p.m., we are all invited to Main Street to celebrate Irish culture and heritage. May the 15th annual St. Patrick's Day parade be an event to remember. *Sláinte!*

* * *

[English]

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine someone is in a situation where they rely on public services, public services that they are entitled to, yet regularly, when they try to access those services, instead of receiving the help they need, someone suggests that they die.

For veterans calling Veterans Affairs Canada, people with disabilities seeking information about benefits, seniors and people living in poverty, accessing public services is now a minefield of bureaucrats suggesting that death might be a better option. These suggestions are traumatizing, and these suggestions are coercive.

We must not accept this as normal. It is not normal. That is why I put forward Bill C-260, the care not coercion act. This bill would prevent bureaucrats from proposing facilitated death to those who are not seeking it. Bill C-260, the care not coercion act, is a critical step toward protecting the rights of people to access public services without hearing a bureaucrat suggest that they die instead.

Anyone interested can find out more about it and read the stories of where this has happened at carenotcoercion.ca.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really proud of the many women in the Eastern Townships who are making a difference in many areas of their community. In honour of International Women's Day, I would like to share some of their contributions.

The first person who comes to mind is Annie Faucher, a city councillor in Sherbrooke. Annie is an accomplished entrepreneur who became an elected municipal official and continues to serve our community with remarkable courage while undergoing treatment for cancer.

The next woman I want to pay tribute to is Chantal Ramsay from the Centre local de développement du Haut-Saint-François. She supports local businesses with her outstanding knack for finding solutions and her unwavering commitment to economic development.

I also want to mention Caroline Sage, who has been instrumental in promoting tourism in the Eastern Townships. Her idea for Foresta Lumina has attracted a lot of attention to our area from all over.

Finally, Andrée-Anne Fiset is the owner of Ferme St-Élie. She took over a farm that did not have a successor and turned it into a fun and welcoming place to learn about farming.

Today, I want to thank them for their commitment and for serving as an inspiration for our younger generations.

* * *

[English]

COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

David McKenzie (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the month of March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Canada, even though it is preventable and highly treatable when caught early. We must make a critical shift in our health care policy to lower the standard screening age from 50 years to 45 years for average-risk Canadians. The medical evidence is clear that early-onset cases are rising, and catching this disease five years sooner will save Canadian lives.

My own brother is a colon cancer survivor, and eight years since a timely diagnosis and treatment, he is alive and well.

Today three cancer survivors, Melissa Groff, Michael Groves and Jennifer Eppel, are here in Ottawa to advocate for policy change. Together their voices turn statistics into stories and policy changes into hope.

To all Canadians, please get screened for colorectal cancer. This simple step can save one's life.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

HOUSING

Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, building Canada strong means taking concrete action to put a roof over everyone's head. That is why we are investing more than \$6 million to support the construction of not six, but 31 housing units as part of the Habitation Palerme project in my riding of Alfred-Pelland.

We have listened and we are taking action to build more homes and build them faster. Seniors, families, people living alone and vulnerable people deserve safe and affordable housing that is close to essential services.

This project is part of the rapid housing initiative, a federal program that is accelerating the construction of affordable housing to meet the most urgent needs. These investments will provide stability, dignity and hope for dozens of households. That is how we are building for the future.

*Statements by Members**[English]***NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR ATHLETE**

Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the remarkable career of one of Newfoundland and Labrador's greatest athletes, Brad Gushue. Not only is he a gold medallist and a bronze medallist, but he has also captured six Brier titles, a world championship, two Pan Continental Curling Championships and two world junior titles. He has also won the grand slam of curling 15 times.

After more than two decades representing Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada with pride, Brad recently curled the final game of his extraordinary curling career. His leadership, dedication and sportsmanship have inspired athletes right across our great nation.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Brad Gushue on an incredible career, in thanking him for the pride he has brought to our country and in extending to him our best wishes for the next chapter of his life.

* * *

IRAN

Hon. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the military situation in Iran. Once again, brinkmanship by the ayatollahs has plunged Iran into war. Innocent Iranians are caught in the crossfire of a war they are not responsible for, as it is not of their making.

After the trauma of witnessing the regime butcher tens of thousands of innocent protesters, Iranians are now contending with war. Let us hope that this will end swiftly and lead to the end of this odious regime. Iranians, Canadians and the world want to see an end to 47 years of theocracy. However, civilians on the ground in Iran and their relatives in Canada can simultaneously fear the mullahs and the bombs raining down from the skies.

These are hopeful but perilous times. May the brave people of Iran finally experience what we take for granted in Canada, peace and freedom.

In conclusion, if the hon. members know any Iranian Canadians in their ridings, it would be a good time to check in.

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*[Translation]***SERIOUS ROAD ACCIDENT IN BEAUCE**

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, Beauce was deeply shaken by a serious accident involving a bus carrying a group of young cadets.

Sadly, Xavier Landry Rousseau, a 13-year-old cadet from Scott, unfortunately lost his life. Several other teenagers were injured, some seriously. This tragedy has devastated families, loved ones and the entire community, including the greater cadet family. In these difficult times, our thoughts are with the young boy's family, the injured teens, and all the cadets, officers and instructors affected by this tragedy.

I also want to acknowledge the first responders, police officers, firefighters and medical staff for their outstanding work and quick response. On behalf of the people of Beauce, I offer my deepest sympathy to Xavier's family, the young cadets, their loved ones and the entire Beauce community.

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● (1410)

*[English]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot control what happens overseas, but we can control the policies here at home that are making life less affordable. Right now, higher oil prices should be a huge opportunity for Canada. We are blessed with the fourth-largest oil reserves in the world, and our allies are asking for reliable energy.

Instead of Canadians' getting resources to market, the Liberals keep putting up roadblocks and excuses. They have not approved a single new pipeline to tidewater, and the much-touted Major Projects Office, which was supposed to speed things up, has not approved a single project. Maybe if a pipeline had Liberal insiders connected to it, like a certain wind farm in Nova Scotia, or even Brookfield, the government would actually care about getting it built.

The Liberals' industrial carbon tax is driving investment out of Canada, and to make matters worse, they are raising the tax. Canadian Natural recently paused an \$8.25-billion project in Alberta because of destructive Liberal policies. Canada should be powering our economy and supplying energy to our allies, so why will the Liberals not get out of the way and scrap the anti-development laws?

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PARALYMPIC ATHLETE FROM NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an exceptional Canadian athlete, Liam Hickey from Newfoundland and Labrador, who has proudly represented our nation as a member of the Canadian para ice hockey team at the Paralympics in Milan, Italy.

Mr. Hickey has long demonstrated exceptional dedication to sport and his community. His achievements on the world stage are remarkable. He has represented Canada at both the summer and winter Paralympic Games, earned multiple medals at world championships and earned two Paralympics silver medals. His continued excellence is a testament to his skill and unwavering commitment to sport.

Yesterday, team Canada celebrated its first victory at the games, with Assistant Captain Hickey contributing significantly with a goal and two assists. This performance reflects not only his athletic ability but also his leadership and determination. Liam Hickey is an inspiration to athletes across Newfoundland—

Statements by Members

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

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IMMIGRATIONS, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the present Liberal government, foreign conflicts are spilling into Canadian streets, and Jewish Canadians are paying the price. Just last week, three synagogues were damaged by gunfire. This is not really surprising, since Liberal immigration policies approve some asylum claims without even talking to the claimant. After the fact, some are found to be foreign agents who should be deported.

Yesterday at the immigration committee, the government said it could not deport IRGC regime officials, for several reasons. The first excuse is that the Liberals protected their right to claim asylum. The second excuse is that there are currently no flights to Iran. The third excuse is that the IRGC regime officials' privacy is more important than the safety of Canadians. It is ridiculous.

Our immigration system is broken, and Canadians are fed up. The reality is that the Liberal immigration minister has failed to protect our borders, while hundreds of IRGC agents safely reside in Canada. She is allowing bad actors into Canada and doing nothing to stop them from terrorizing Canadians. Why does the immigration minister still have her job after failing Canadians so badly?

* * *

[*Translation*]

COLLÈGE CHARLES-LEMOYNE RIVERAINS

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Riverains, the M18 AAA hockey team at Collège Charles-Lemoyne in Sainte-Catherine has had another excellent season. They climbed to the top of their division in the Quebec M18 AAA hockey league.

I was impressed not only by the players' talent but also by the discipline required by their sports education program. Players have to juggle a strict training schedule, a lot of homework and 42 games played across Quebec with school days upon their return. They are coping with this demanding pace, as evidenced today by their outstanding game play and academic excellence.

The leaders behind their success include their general manager, David Crowdis, and their head coach, Olivier Latendresse, whose work and dedication inspire the whole team.

The Riverains are now in the playoffs, and having seen how well they play, I can say that this is top-level hockey. I wish the Riverains the best of luck this evening at the Sportium arena in Sainte-Catherine.

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QUEBEC STUDENT UNION

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years, Quebec students have been coming together to make a real and lasting difference in the living and academic conditions of thousands of Quebecers through the Quebec Student Union, a national association representing 15 university member associations. Its commitment to supporting the next generation of researchers

and improving the living conditions of academics is commendable. It plays an essential role in paving the way for the future of scientific development in Quebec.

At a time when scientific and technological developments are moving at lightning speed, now more than ever we need partners like the Quebec Student Union to remind us of the conditions that are necessary to encourage research and innovation. That is one of the things this organization does. Its lobbying efforts with various levels of government are a testament to its firm commitment to supporting the work of new generations of researchers and academics in Quebec.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish the Quebec Student Union continued success and, in particular, the best of luck in its endeavours.

* * *

● (1415)

[*English*]

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN COMMUNITY

Shannon Miedema (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the heels of Black History Month, I am honoured to recognize and celebrate the incredible contributions of the African Nova Scotian community. Halifax is home to a sombre history of racism that must not be forgotten, and reconciliation must be an ongoing effort. The Africville Museum is ensuring that this happens by sharing the community's history, celebrating its achievements and advocating for change.

The African Nova Scotian Road to Economic Prosperity is driving the course to practical reparations for this community. The African Nova Scotian Justice Institute provides free legal services and guidance to African Nova Scotians. New Roots Community Land Trust is advocating for investment into community infrastructure targeted at displaced African Nova Scotian communities. Many other community members are driving important change.

Today in Ottawa, I want to recognize these incredible and passionate organizations that are doing such important work. It is not going unnoticed, and it deserves to be celebrated.

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THE ECONOMY

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, affordability of goods and services in Canada is the number one concern for Canadians. We cannot control what happens abroad, but the Liberals control the policies that are making life more expensive here at home. We have the worst food price inflation in the G7 and the only shrinking economy.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister is ramming through his newly renamed carbon tax, the clean fuel standard, harming farmers, fishermen and every family buying food. Add on the industrial carbon tax on steel, aluminum, plastic and farm equipment. These costs are made here in Canada, not abroad.

As Tom from London told me, the price of a pack of eight burgers jumped from \$15 to \$18.50. That is 23% in weeks. Delores from Strathroy said it plainly: “The Prime Minister has no clue how the average Canadian lives.” Bill from Fallowfield warned, “We’re heading for a country-wide recession.”

When will the Liberals accept responsibility and remove the policies that are crushing Canadian families?

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day is a moment to recognize the leadership, resilience and contributions of women across Canada. Women strengthen our communities, drive innovation and shape a more inclusive future. When women succeed, everyone benefits.

The women's program supports projects that break down systemic barriers to economic equality and leadership.

[Translation]

That is why our government is investing in women's economic participation, improving affordable child care, supporting women entrepreneurs and removing barriers to opportunities.

[English]

The women entrepreneurship strategy has helped over 490,000 women start, scale and grow businesses. Supports include access to capital, mentorship, skills training and business networks.

[Translation]

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we celebrate the progress that has been made, recognize the work that still needs to be done and reaffirm our commitment to advancing equality so that every woman and girl—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the member, but we must move on to oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have always been wars in the Middle East. We cannot control that. However, the problems were never at our doorstep. People kept their problems at home.

After 10 years of out-of-control Liberal border and law-and-order policies that have allowed criminals, terrorists and illegal guns to enter our country and criminals to be released onto our streets, we are now dealing with shootings at our synagogues, Iranian dissi-

dents being killed, more shootings and 700 agents of the Iranian regime.

What will the Prime Minister do to make Canada safe again?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government condemns the shootings at synagogues in Toronto and at the U.S. consulate. That is one of the reasons why the government is vigilant when it comes to terrorists. The IRGC is listed as a terrorist group.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Meanwhile, the Liberal Prime Minister is letting those terrorists stay here in Canada, Mr. Speaker. He is not deporting them. We need to be safe here at home.

The cost of living also needs to be affordable at home. Before this war, the Liberal Prime Minister created the worst food inflation in the G7, which is driving up grocery prices faster than in any other country. Global factors are not to blame for that. What is to blame are his policies, the inflationary taxes that he put in place.

Will he reverse these inflationary taxes and deficits so that Canadians can afford groceries?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking action against the IRGC. For example, 10,000 people are banned from entering Canada.

We are taking action on Canadians' purchasing power. We have cut taxes and increased food support, and we are providing child care for Canadian families.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have always been wars in the Middle East, but never before did those wars spill onto our streets here in Canada. After 10 years of Liberal immigration and Liberal open borders, they have allowed criminals, terrorists and illegal guns to enter our country. After 10 years of Liberal catch-and-release laws that the Prime Minister has not changed one word on, we have criminals released on our streets, and now our synagogues are being shot at, Iranian dissidents are killed on our streets and there are 700 IRGC terrorist agents on our streets.

What will the Prime Minister do to restore the safety that Canadians had before his Liberal government took office?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to go quickly.

Bill C-14 would change the bail laws. The member might want to read it and definitely wants to support it. The member opposite has voted against every single gun control measure ever put before the House.

The government has banned the Islamic guard. The government has sanctioned over 200 Iranian entities. The government is investigating over 17,000 individual cases. We are protecting this country with 1,000 more RCMP—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I voted against was a Liberal approach that has doubled gun crime by wasting billions of dollars going after duck hunters, farmers and legal sport shooters. The Prime Minister is more worried about protecting turkeys from hunters than he is about protecting synagogues from terrorists. That is the real problem.

We have 700 IRGC terrorists in this country. It does not matter if they are banned. If they are on our streets, they are a danger. They are shooting up synagogues, killing dissidents and threatening our people.

Will the Prime Minister reverse the Liberal agenda that unleashed this violence on our streets?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we want to protect synagogues, we want to protect community centres and we want to protect places of worship, which is why Bill C-9 is before the House today.

I challenge the member opposite to put his votes behind his words to protect the Jewish community and to protect communities of faith across this country.

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TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his solution to synagogues being shot up is to ban sections of the Jewish Torah. That is not our solution on this side of the House. That is according to his own immigration minister and his own heritage minister.

We need to be safe at home. We need to be affordable at home. Even before this war broke out and raised gas prices, the Prime Minister doubled food price inflation and gave us the worst grocery price increases in all of the G7, so excuses about global impacts are not going to work.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his new taxes on food, fuel, farmers and fertilizer so Canadians can afford to eat?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member opposite read the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects the Torah, which protects the Bible and which protects freedom of expression. The

House should not be otherwise informed by possible misrepresentation. We should follow the true word that protects all Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was about food prices. The Prime Minister said he could be judged by the prices at the grocery store. Since he took office, food price inflation has doubled, and the Prime Minister has introduced new taxes that increase the fuel prices for the farmers who feed us. Now, 2.2 million people are lined up at food banks and faced with even worse fuel costs today.

Will the Liberal Prime Minister reverse his latest Liberal tax so that Canadians can afford to eat?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it feels like Groundhog Day. I am once again required to remind the member opposite that the impact of the industrial carbon tax on fuel prices is approximately zero.

The impact, though, of our trade deals on the farmers in his constituency is absolutely enormous. It is almost planting season, and the farmers of Alberta, including in Battle River—Crowfoot, can plant canola.

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[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, bring out the good china; we have visitors in Parliament. Judging by the Prime Minister's inclination to travel the world like Marco Polo, he is his own foreign affairs minister. Unfortunately, this foreign affairs minister is not known for his clarity, and by not accepting his own invitation yesterday, he missed a tremendous opportunity to explain his policies in Parliament.

When will he explain his strategic vision for the Middle East?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's policy is clear: Canada supports the need to prevent Iran's nuclear program and the export of terrorism.

Canada is not taking part in offensive operations by the United States and Israel, and it never will.

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I could call that clear, that would be news.

In military terms, Canada is clearly the smallest of the major players. Among the mid-level players, it is clearly the most isolated and no one seems to have understood its position so far.

Has the Prime Minister spoken with our allies in Europe? What have they agreed on in terms of a common position?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just had a conversation with the chair of the G7, Mr. Macron. I had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan. I had a conversation with the President of the United States. That is three members of the G7. I am the fourth member. I will be meeting with Mr. Starmer, who is a fifth member of the G7 and with Ms. Meloni.

Yes, we will find common ground within the G7. We will do that and there will be de-escalation.

• (1430)

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I should have been more specific in my question and asked whether he spoke with all of our allies in Europe together. Also, it will take a lot more continental drift for the United States to end up in Europe.

Does the Prime Minister intend to propose any short-term measures to help people who are suffering and who will continue to suffer as a direct result of this war?

I am talking about purchasing power, inflation, pensioners and home ownership for young families. I am talking about all of these issues that cannot be resolved in Norway over a five-year period but that must be addressed now for the people of Quebec and Canada.

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the best option is de-escalation and peace. That is why I am having conversations with other members of the G7 and with leaders of Middle Eastern countries, such as Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. We also need to use the G7's oil reserves.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. Record food bank usage, personal bankruptcy rates and an increasing number of Canadians borrowing money to buy food are proof of that. While there are some things that are outside of our control, there are things that the government does control, like its new fuel tax, which is already raising the price of gas by seven cents a litre and is set to climb up to 17¢ a litre, raising the cost of everything that Canadians buy.

When will the Liberals finally take responsibility for their reckless policies and stop making life more expensive for Canadians?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Studies show that the impact of the industrial carbon price on food is zero. The clean fuel regulations do not impose a price at the pump, but they do create an impressive economy for our canola farmers. He should speak to the leader of his Conservative Party. There is a canola crush plant in his constituency, and Canada's largest renewable diesel facility is right on the edge of that riding. Canola farmers will see their price go up by \$1.09 a bushel, according to Advanced Biofuels Canada.

Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every country in the G7 is facing external pressures, but this government stands alone in having created the worst food price inflation and the

only shrinking economy in the G7. Instead of making life more affordable, the Liberals are making it worse with their higher fuel and carbon taxes, which are raising the costs for farmers, fishers and truckers, driving up the cost of everything for cash-strapped Canadians.

Why do the Liberals not finally focus on what they can control and get rid of these harmful policies that are punishing Canadians?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what we can control: building Cedar LNG, building Woodfibre LNG, expanding Tilbury LNG, approving LNG Canada phase two, approving Ksi Lisims and approving the PRGT pipeline to the west coast.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know we cannot control what happens abroad, but the government controls the policies here at home. Under the Liberal government, Canada now has the worst food price inflation in the G7 and the only shrinking economy in the G7. Our families, seniors, workers and those who transport our food have no alternative but to use fuel. These costs are imposed here at home, not abroad.

When will the Liberals end the era of self-sabotage and remove the policies that are driving up costs here at home?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they seem to like to repeat their questions, so let me repeat the answer.

Studies have shown the industrial carbon price does not increase the cost of food. The clean fuel regulations do not impose a price right at the pump, and if they want me to be really clear, it creates an economic opportunity. I would think they would like to see that. In fact, according to the Advanced Biofuels Canada, it will create or preserve an average farm revenue by \$60,000. That should mean something to the members opposite.

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tell that to the producers and farmers in Victoria, Carleton and York counties in New Brunswick, who are being hit by the Liberals' newly renamed carbon tax, the clean fuel standard, which adds seven cents a litre. At the same time, the Liberals have raised the industrial carbon tax on steel, aluminum and farm equipment. All this is driving up costs for dairy, beef and poultry producers in my region and throughout the country. These costs are imposed here at home.

I will ask again. When will the Liberals end their era of self-sabotage and remove the policies that are making life more expensive for all Canadians?

• (1435)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things we cannot control in the world, but there are many things we can control. What we definitely can control is how we build one Canadian economy.

There is good news on our manufacturing PMI, which basically monitors new business activity. My colleague referred to steel, aluminum, auto, etc., and we are at a 13-month high. That means that businesses are now receiving more orders, and more jobs are being created. The tariffs have impacted us, but we have a good plan, we are bouncing back, and we will fight for jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

CARBON PRICING

Bernard Généreux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to farmers in my riding recently and they have had enough. They are paying more and more for inputs like gas, fertilizer and farm equipment all because of the Liberal carbon and clean fuel taxes, for example.

Meanwhile, grocery prices continue to rise and everyone is paying more and more, which is really hard on families.

When will this Liberal government finally stop going after those who help our communities survive and eliminate these inflationary taxes?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like set the record straight in terms of what we are hearing from the other side. Repeating something day after day in question period does not make it true. To keep it simple for my colleague, according to all of the serious and rigorous analyses that have been conducted, the impact of the industrial carbon tax is virtually zero.

The Conservatives are telling us that there are things that we cannot control and things that we can. One of the things that they should control is how they vote. They voted against a tax cut for 22 million Canadians. They voted against the Canada child benefit, which has reduced child poverty by 40% in Canada. They voted against the grocery benefit, which will give families about \$1,800 a year this year.

They should change their approach and support this government's affordability measures.

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SENIORS

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Cúram software has racked up cost overruns of \$5 billion and it does not work.

The minister asked for cases. I would encourage her to read this morning's Radio-Canada article by Valérie Gamache. In it, Ms. Deraps from the Gaspé said, and I quote: "I called in. The gentleman

Oral Questions

told me that he was really sorry, but that he could not give me any guarantees. He said that it could take two days, two weeks, two months or six months, and that he had no idea when the files would be up to date".

If our entrepreneurs managed their businesses the way the Liberals are managing this, they would all be bankrupt. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister does not care about this.

Who is going to take the lead on the other side?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are able to deliver old age security benefits to 7.7 million Canadian seniors using Cúram. According to what the Auditor General said in 2014, the old system had reached the end of its useful life. If this change had not been made, it would have jeopardized the benefits of 7.7 million Canadians.

Yes, there are cases that need to be dealt with, and they are being dealt with urgently by my colleague, the Minister of Jobs.

We want to ensure that all seniors in Canada receive their benefits on time in a secure and reliable manner.

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been asking questions about this for months. There are still 85,000 seniors waiting.

The minister asked for cases. Another case in this morning's article was that of Martial Lavoie, a constituent of mine who is listening right now. He calls Service Canada almost every day, hoping to find out whether any progress has been made on his case. Day after day, the pre-recorded message says that, because of a problem with the self-service system, information about old age security payments is not available. That is the message.

Why must seniors pay the price for this financial and IT fiasco, and why should future generations have to foot the \$5-billion bill?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member has a Mr. Lavoie who is experiencing such difficulties, surely he knows that there is an MP hotline that he can use himself, or, as I have mentioned many times, he can also come to me and we will ensure that Mr. Lavoie gets his benefits urgently.

As the member knows, this is an ancient system that was prone to problems and difficulties. Canadians expect systems that are modern and that they can access online. This provides security for benefits that Canadians rely on in a time when security is of paramount importance. I hope the member opposite—

Oral Questions

• (1440)

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Shefford.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, while answering a question from the Bloc Québécois, the minister accused us of fearmongering over Cúram. Apparently, pointing out that 85,000 seniors are experiencing problems with their OAS is fearmongering.

People are not worried about the Bloc Québécois's questions, but about the costly failures of a malfunctioning computer system.

Radio-Canada wrote, “The failures of the new federal OAS pension management system are causing concern and anxiety among many Canadian seniors.” Does the minister believe Radio-Canada is fearmongering as well?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that what scares people the most is a system that breaks down when they need it.

[English]

They are afraid of a system that will fail them in their time of need, and let me be clear. That is exactly why we have modernized this system, because a 60-year-old system was guaranteed to fail. In fact, that is what the Auditor General said.

I think we agree that it was time to modernize, and 7.7 million Canadians are receiving payments on time, on schedule. The remaining Canadians who have applied by paper largely are getting the help they need. We urge all Canadians to apply online for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Shefford.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thousands of seniors are worried and anxious because of the minister's computer system. To be honest, she does not seem to be taking the situation very seriously.

The government is more willing to defend Cúram than stand up for seniors. Seniors may not be getting their OAS payments because of the issues in Cúram, but bills are still coming in. They still have to buy groceries to put food on the table, and they still have to pay rent on the first of the month.

What concrete action will the minister take to help the more than 85,000 seniors who are victims of her malfunctioning computer system?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): In fact, Mr. Speaker, the number of seniors waiting for their first payment is going down. I will remind the member opposite that these are very specific cases that are largely paper applications.

This system is designed to provide the stability that Canadians expect, including Quebecers, when they receive benefits from

Canada. More and more people are applying online, and I will just say that it is a very important tool that Canadians expect to have available when it is their turn to apply for CPP and OAS.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the IRGC shot down flight PS752, 55 Canadians were murdered. In the days that followed, I stood with those grieving families in my riding and promised them that Canada would be a place of safety, not a place where people connected to that regime could live freely. However, yesterday at committee, officials admitted that they cannot deport the Iranian regime officials already here. They can claim asylum. They say there are no flights and that their identities must remain protected.

How is it possible that the victims' families live in fear while members of that regime live safely in our communities?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have taken decisive action to ensure accountability for IRGC officials. First and foremost, we listed the Iranian state as a state sponsor of terrorism. We have sanctioned over 200 individuals, we listed the IRGC in 2024, and we are expeditiously working on removing those who are inadmissible to Canada.

We will continue to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians, including Iranian Canadians.

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this threat is no longer distant. It is happening right here in Canada. Last week, three synagogues were shot at. Now an Iranian activist has gone missing. Police are investigating it as a homicide while the Iranian community fears Tehran's involvement. Meanwhile, hundreds of people linked to the IRGC are living freely in our country.

I stood beside PS752 families in my riding and promised that Canada would stand up to this regime. Instead, the government has allowed its agents to operate on our soil. Why has the minister allowed Canada to become a safe haven for a terrorist regime?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, Canada is leading the fight on ensuring accountability for those impacted by PS752. We have taken action right at the International Criminal Court, and we continue to work with families and survivors to ensure that they receive the justice they seek.

Let me be very clear. Those who are members of the IRGC, who are senior members, are inadmissible to be in Canada, and they will be removed.

* * *

• (1445)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals are allowing foreign conflicts to spill onto our streets, and Canadians are paying the price. An Iranian activist is missing, and it looks more and more like Tehran is involved. Meanwhile, hundreds of IRGC agents live in Canada, hanging out in cafés and going to the gym, yet Canadian officials say they cannot deport these terrorists because they can claim asylum, there are no flights to Iran, and their privacy must be protected.

Thoughts and prayers are not going to cut it. Why is the immigration minister still failing to protect Canadians, and why does she still have her job?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. The IRGC was listed as a terrorist entity in 2024. Canada has listed Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. We have sanctioned over 200 Iranian officials. We are working to ensure that those who are inadmissible in Canada are removed, and we have already started the process. One has already been removed. We have cancelled dozens of visas for those who are ineligible to be here. We will continue to ensure the safety and security of Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can I just recap what is in the public safety minister's QP binder? He just said that of the 700 Iranian regime officials and human rights abusers, one has been deported.

Why has he not asked his department officials to at least update the garbage that is in his QP binder?

The Speaker: The hon. member used that term once before, and I did not quite like it. I do have a responsibility for trying to maintain some decorum. I do not think it is very parliamentary.

The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first of all reject the notion of the 700 number the party opposite has been using. There are efforts in place, as we speak, by the Canada Border Services Agency to remove those who are inadmissible to Canada. It has reviewed over 18,000 applications for inadmissibility. It has opened over 170 investigations, and approximately 240 visas have been cancelled. We have removed individuals who are members of the IRGC. We will continue to go through the process to remove them. Let us be very clear. Those who are ineligible and inadmissible will be removed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Okay, Mr. Speaker, he said he has removed one, and now he says he disputes the 700 number. Is it 1,000? Is it 2,000? What number is it?

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, no, this is serious.

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker, we have members of the Persian community who are seeing their businesses shot up. People are living in fear in the street, and the Liberal immigration minister has done nothing to change the law, nothing to keep her officials in line.

Why does she still have her job?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear here. In 2024, the former government listed the IRGC as a terrorist entity in Canada. IRGC officials who are found in Canada have had their visas cancelled. They have lost their status, and they are being removed by CBSA. We will continue to do that. Any permit extensions have not been granted. They will be removed.

On this side of the House, we will continue to stand with the Iranian people. We will support the CBSA and do everything necessary to protect the safety of Canadians.

* * *

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, men and boys in this country are facing a mental health crisis. In this country, 75% of suicides are men. In this country, 75% of drug overdoses are in men. Men's life expectancy is 4.5 years shorter, and 65% of men delay seeking help.

Can the Minister of Health confirm that the government is committed to ending the stigma around men's mental health?

• (1450)

Hon. Marjorie Michel (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome my colleague from Edmonton Riverbend to this side of the House.

We need to end stigma around men's and boys' mental health. This is why we launched a national conversation on men's and boys' health, so we can make a real difference in the health and well-being of men and boys across the country. This will help create stronger families and thriving communities. We look forward to working with all parties to make sure everyone has a voice in this conversation.

*Oral Questions***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada cannot control global events or leaders, but Liberals control the policies that drive up costs here at home. The energy minister brags about pipelines to the U.S. but spins about Canadian pipelines. Here are the facts. Two export pipelines to Europe and Asia were killed by the Liberals. They bought the costly TMX, which mostly goes to the U.S., without a path for the company to build. There is no progress on their promised Pacific pipeline and nothing from the Major Projects Office. The federal industrial carbon tax, which the U.S. does not have, costs Canadian businesses.

Why will the PM not repeal his anti-development laws and taxes so Canada can fuel allies abroad and bring affordability home?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what they have been doing, but we have been working with the Government of Alberta. We have been working with the Government of Alberta to see the Pathways project built. We have been working with the Government of Alberta to look at options to the west coast. We have been looking, with the Government of Alberta, for new nuclear and for new renewables. They should get on board too.

Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is spin, spin, spin, because here is the deal. Last year, the Prime Minister promised a Pacific pipeline yet kept all the laws and regs that block building. The Liberals brought in Bill C-5 to work around their own red tape. Conservatives worked to improve and pass it, but there have been no results so far. The feds have not started their indigenous consultation. No private sector company will touch a pipeline alone under Liberal laws. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians want pipelines. The world wants Canadian energy, but Canada cannot ship it because of the Liberals.

When will the PM get out of the way, scrap his anti-development agenda and give Canadians certainty and affordability here at home?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assume the member opposite is, then, suggesting that the Premier of Alberta get out of the way. I guess she is suggesting that Minister Jean get out of the way. I guess she is suggesting that Minister Neudorf get out of the way. They are all working with us to build Canada. Maybe the Conservatives should try that too.

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been in office for a year already and, like a good old Liberal, has only re-announced projects that were already approved. There have been no new energy projects proposed, let alone built. The Major Projects Office has been reviewing the Kitimat project for 180 days already. Meanwhile, Germany built an entire LNG terminal in only 194 days. Conservatives wanted shovels in the ground this week. We previously tried to pass the Canadian sovereignty act to make us stronger at home and support our allies, but the Liberals voted against that.

Why will they not cancel their anti-development policies and get things done?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives built nothing,

here is what we did. LNG Canada phase one is shipping today. Cedar LNG is under development. Woodfibre LNG is under construction. Tilbury is expanding. LNG Canada is ready to go. Ksi Lisims is ready to go. We could keep going. We are building. They do nothing.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the past four decades, two wars have plunged the world into a major energy crisis. Our allies are looking for reliable suppliers. Canada has 10% of the world's oil reserves and a wealth of natural gas, uranium, and hydroelectricity. It is clear that Canada should be a world leader in energy.

The reality is that we do not even have the infrastructure to export our resources to our allies who need them. Parliament gave the Liberals exceptional powers to accelerate major projects, but so far nothing is being done.

Why is the Liberal government continuing to allow Canada to be a country full of unrealized potential?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree with our opposition colleague that it is important to build a strong economy in Canada. The good news is that the Conservative Party helped adopt Bill C-5, which, in fact, enabled the government to accelerate the construction of major projects, including major energy infrastructure projects like the ones our colleague just mentioned.

I was in Contrecoeur, near Montreal. Other ports are in the works. There is good news coming in the next few weeks and I look forward to having our colleague's support.

● (1455)

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is good news on the horizon, but once again, press releases are not projects. Germany managed to build a liquefied natural gas export terminal in 194 days. What was Canada able to do in 194 days? It made announcements.

If we developed our resources, we could create wealth, fund our public services, make our constituents wealthier and invest in the transition to other forms of energy.

The world needs what we have, and families are struggling to make ends meet. When will the Liberal government stop talking and start approving projects to export our resources and make society more prosperous?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of echoing our colleague the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, I must say that we have good news for the hon. member.

This week, the Prime Minister was in India, where we signed an agreement worth over \$2.5 billion for energy exports. We worked with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to approve the Bay du Nord project off the coast of that province. We also approved NexGen's uranium mine in Saskatchewan.

We are getting work done while the Conservatives are busy criticizing.

* * *

[English]

INTERNAL TRADE

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says Canada should strive to be our own best customer. Well, Conservatives could not agree more, and that is why we want a one Canadian economy where a craft brewer in the Maritimes, a distiller in Ontario or a vintner in the Okanagan can sell to any adult Canadian anywhere in this country. However, the Prime Minister's Canada Day deadline of last year to fix this has come and gone, leaving beer, wine and spirits stuck behind trade barriers.

Will the government finally live up to its own rhetoric, support our common-sense Conservative bill and allow Canadians to finally be our own best customer?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our colleague for his consistent work in terms of removing barriers to interprovincial trade. As he knows very well, the federal government removed all our exemptions to free trade in Canada by legislation supported by the Conservatives in June. I know he has been, and he should be, as pleased as we are that the governments of Ontario and of Nova Scotia recently signed an agreement to allow direct-to-consumer sale of alcohol. I am meeting interprovincial trade ministers later this month, and we will absolutely go further.

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, producers in my riding find it easier to ship a bottle of wine to London, England, than to London, Ontario. Trade walls are blocking the growth of producers across this great country. The Prime Minister tells Canadians that we need to focus on the things we can control. Parliament has control over Canada Post and interprovincial shipping.

I invite the Liberals to steal this idea. They could do so today. Will the Prime Minister focus on what we can control, steal my bill,

finally tear down these walls for all Canadian consumers and producers, and free the beer?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, our colleague has highlighted consistently one of the important challenges in having free trade across Canada. As he well knows, the regulation of the sale of alcohol is within the hands of provincial and territorial governments. However, his idea of changing section 19 of the Canada Post Corporation Act to incentivize provinces to allow it and to co-operate with the Government of Canada is a good one. I will happily raise it with provincial ministers later this month, and I look forward to working with him on this important issue.

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the Prime Minister's promising to eliminate all federal barriers to interprovincial trade by Canada Day 2025, that promise has proven to be an illusion. In many cases, it is still easier for British Columbian distilleries to sell their products to Washington state than to Nova Scotia.

Can the Prime Minister provide a specific date when it will be easier for British Columbian distillers to sell in Canada versus in the United States?

● (1500)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Again, Mr. Speaker, I indicated to our colleague that we have called an urgent meeting of interprovincial trade ministers following the Prime Minister's meeting with first ministers at the end of January. That is happening in a few weeks. We are going to seek to make progress in collaboration with provinces.

I would ask our colleague to note that it was Ontario and Nova Scotia, two champions for the removal of interprovincial trade barriers, that signed an agreement to allow direct-to-consumer sales of alcohol. I will happily raise it with provincial ministers and do what is necessary for the Government of Canada to be a partner.

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Liberal government misled Canadians when it made the promise that interprovincial trade barriers would actually be eliminated in Canada by 2025. The CBC reported in January that interprovincial trade is still like a 9% tariff on the Canadian economy, accounting for \$210 billion of lost goods.

Oral Questions

I will ask the question again. Can the Prime Minister provide a specific date, not just when alcohol will be free to trade but when all services and goods will be free to trade in Canada among provinces to build our country up?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade, and One Canadian Economy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our colleague would remember very well the votes that happened at the end of June when we passed Bill C-5, which removed all federal barriers to interprovincial trade in Canada. He is highlighting something with which we agree: the important GDP boost of removing all these barriers.

The vast majority of these barriers have always been in the hands of provinces and territories. We thought it was important for the Government of Canada to eliminate our exceptions to free trade in Canada. We did that, and now we are going to work with the provinces to get the job done.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Eric St-Pierre (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians elected a new government with a mandate to build Canada strong, keep our country safe and expand our international partnerships. In a rapidly changing world, our government is focused on what we can control.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell the House about the progress we are making in our defence partnerships around the world?

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a Pacific country and we are proud to strengthen our partnership with Australia. Last week, we were in Australia to strengthen our relationship and increase our co-operation in the areas of military exercises and procurement. That includes training our forces on the Arctic over-the-horizon radar system.

We are quickly expanding our defence partnerships around the world.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have recently learned that the Liberal government provided a \$206-million loan below market rate and nearly \$150 million in subsidies to a wind farm in Nova Scotia linked closely to former Liberal MPs. Meanwhile, a similar project secured \$240 million in private sector funding at no cost to the taxpayer. The difference between the two, of course, is the closeness to the Liberal government.

Why did the Liberals provide this sweetheart deal to their well-connected friends at the expense of Canadians?

Hon. Gregor Robertson (Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Develop-

ment Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the project is about clean energy. It is about local jobs and economic growth. It was approved through the independent process at the Canada Infrastructure Bank, led by non-partisan officials.

Even the Progressive Conservative government of Nova Scotia is backing the project and supporting it, and it is easy to see why. It is creating clean energy. It is creating good jobs for Nova Scotians and strengthening the local community. It is a great project.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members will have to excuse me if I do not take the Liberals' word for it. They call themselves a new government, but they are the same Liberals who 10 times have been found to have broken Canada's ethics laws. They always deny it, and they always defend the indefensible. What we are talking about here is hundreds of millions of dollars going to a sweetheart deal for well-connected Liberal insiders.

The solution is very simple. Instead of just saying, "Trust us", the Liberals can do the right thing and release to Canadians all the information about the decision that led them to give this sweetheart deal to well-connected Liberal insiders.

• (1505)

Hon. Gregor Robertson (Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and Minister responsible for Pacific Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians need action, and they need clean energy, not political games from the Conservatives here. They have the support of the Progressive Conservative government in Nova Scotia to advance this project and fund it. Officials at the Infrastructure Bank have supported the project. These are good jobs, energy reliability and choice for Nova Scotians.

Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal insiders connected to former Liberal MPs received a \$206-million loan below market rate from the Canada Infrastructure Bank and nearly \$150 million in subsidies for a Nova Scotia wind farm project. Canadians are tired of Liberal insiders getting rich off taxpayer dollars while millions of Canadians are lined up at food banks every single month.

When will the Liberals finally make life more affordable for Canadians instead of lining the pockets of Liberal-connected insiders?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do members know who is tired of the conspiracy theories? The Conservative Premier of Nova Scotia is. The Conservative Premier of Nova Scotia stood beside us and said this is a great project. This is a project that creates jobs in Nova Scotia. This is a project that brings new energy to Nova Scotia. The Conservatives should get on board.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on December 22, Canada submitted its plan for the long-term reform of first nations child and family services, which has the potential to transform care for our children and to address historic wrongs.

Can the Minister of Indigenous Services please speak to the contents of the proposal to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have launched a new path forward to long-term reform of child and family services, one that acknowledges regional realities and puts first nations children and families first. This approach is supported by an ongoing commitment of over \$35 billion for a seven-year period and \$4.4 billion ongoing afterwards.

I want to ensure that children are connected to their families, cultures and communities. By seeking regional agreements, we are able to respect the distinct realities of first nations across the country. We are committed to moving ahead with urgency, care and responsibility.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to the Tumbler Ridge families of Zoey, Tiki, Abel, Ezekiel, Kylie, Shannda, Emmett and Jennifer, we say that we continue to grieve with them.

I thank our leader, the Prime Minister and all the federal leaders for making the trip to Tumbler Ridge to support us. I thank all members who have reached out over these last four weeks to give kind notes to me in some semblance of trying to pass on their peace to me.

I thank the people around the world who have been praying for the Tumbler Ridge community, who have been praying for Maya and other victims and who have been praying for me. Jesus has been the light to me in this darkness, as he has been to so many of the victims' families in this tragedy.

Tumbler Ridge families, though, are now asking what can be done so this never happens again, so I ask the Prime Minister this: Will he commit today to a full public inquiry into the Tumbler Ridge tragedy?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me at the outset extend my deepest condolences to the families and to the community of Tumbler Ridge for the deep impact of what has happened in their community.

I want to acknowledge the incredible leadership of the member opposite, who has tirelessly worked for the last several weeks in supporting the community and ensuring that his community is supported.

I have had a number of conversations with the member over the last several weeks, and one thing I will say today and I will commit to is working with him and with the community to ensure that the right steps are taken. We will work in collaboration with the province of British Columbia.

Oral Questions

We know that there are many unanswered questions. There is a coroner's inquest in progress, as well as an investigation on the internal affairs of policing, but our commitment to the people of Tumbler Ridge is clear. We will seek and get the answers they demand.

* * *

● (1510)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats' hearts also go out to all of the community in Tumbler Ridge.

The Prime Minister told the world in Davos that Canada will be “[p]rincipled in our commitment to...the prohibition of the use of force except when consistent with the UN Charter”. The attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel clearly violates the UN Charter, as the Prime Minister himself has admitted, yet he supports it.

Will the Prime Minister explain to Canadians why he betrayed his commitment and now supports a war he knows is illegal?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we support Iran's never obtaining a nuclear weapon. That has been the policy position of successive governments of Canada. Iran must never have nuclear capacity.

The support is not a blank cheque. Canada reaffirms that international law binds all parties. Canada is a country of international law, and all actors, including the United States and Israel, must respect the rules of international engagement. These are established international processes—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

* * *

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a word for that: hypocrisy.

According to the Liberal slogan, we need to spend less in order to invest more. That sounds nice, but it is still nothing but empty words. In reality, the cuts are very real and they hurt. In many cases, they demonstrate a total lack of vision for the future.

The Liberals have decided to close the agricultural research and development centre in Quebec City. At a time when we need to ensure our food security, increase our productivity and reduce our environmental impact, this decision is tantamount to shooting ourselves in the foot.

Why lose this expertise and why abandon research that is crucial to our future?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Heath MacDonald (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, this is a difficult situation that we find ourselves in due to a lack of investment over a number of years through many governments. Maintaining our presence in every province, streamlining research and development and building a more collaborative science system that supports producers and strengthens our competitiveness is what this government is going to do. We are not going to put ourselves at an uncompetitive level at the national level or international level.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1515)

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 6—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-9

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and to the Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me and giving me an opportunity to speak on this motion. I know my colleagues are still working their way out of the chamber as we end question period, so I am just going to make sure that you are seated and that there is some time and space in the House so that I can speak.

Before I get into my comments, I want to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming. She will be speaking for the latter 10 minutes.

The motion deals with Bill C-9, which is a very important piece of legislation that I am glad to have an opportunity to speak to. It is something I am really hopeful will pass through the House as soon as possible. In my role as the member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, I have some history of working on the various provisions of Bill C-9, which are very much aimed at ensuring that we rid hate from our society and that we take all important necessary steps to ensure that people of all backgrounds and religions, including people who belong to the Jewish faith, the Muslim faith, the Christian faith and any other faiths, feel safe in practising their faith, in living according to their faith and in being able to visit places of worship. Bill C-9 tries to do this.

As many have spoken about in the House, the incidence of hate crimes is rising in Canada. The issues around anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of hatred are significant. It is incumbent on all of us to work together, not in a partisan fashion but as Canadians and as parliamentarians, to exercise our responsibility and duty to pass laws that would allow for the safety of our community and that would allow for our Jewish neighbours, our Muslim neighbours and our neighbours from other backgrounds to be able to live peacefully, as we are all supposed to do and as Canada was founded upon. Bill C-9 captures this.

This bill, as many members would know, proposes to do four important things. First, it would create two offences for obstruction and intimidation intended to prevent someone from accessing a

place used by an identifiable group. I will speak to that particular provision in detail a little later, because it is something that I have been working on. Second, it would create a new stand-alone hate-motivated offence. Third, it would create an offence for wilfully promoting hatred through the public display of hate or terrorist symbols. Last, it would codify the Supreme Court of Canada's definition of "hatred" in the Criminal Code.

The most important part of this legislation is around making sure that people are not obstructed or intimidated when trying to access their place of worship, for example, somebody who wants to go to their synagogue on the Sabbath or somebody who wants to go to their mosque for jummah prayers. These are very important rights that we have as Canadians to practise our faith freely without any fear of harassment or intimidation.

This legislation would create a criminal offence around anybody trying to take away that particular freedom. There have been instances in my community here in Ottawa with various important institutions where members of the Jewish community regularly congregate or meet as a social space or even at a long-term care home. The Hillel Lodge, for example, where seniors who are mostly of Jewish faith live, was subject to a protest. Of course, that was extremely traumatizing and troubling for the members of the community.

● (1520)

I have been working very closely with our Jewish community here in Ottawa, for instance, with the Jewish Federation of Ottawa. I want to thank friends like Danya Vered and Adam Silver, who have championed and advocated for this legislation on behalf of the community to ensure that we create provisions and laws in our criminal courts that would not allow something like that to take place and that people can peacefully live their Jewish way of life and be able to practise their faith. Of course, this legislation is not just limited to the Jewish community. It applies to all faith communities.

There has been precedent to do this. This is not something unique. In my former role as the attorney general of Ontario, we brought in similar legislation at the provincial level to protect women accessing abortion clinics or sexual health clinics, so that they would not be harassed or intimidated from accessing the very vital right of access to medical care. We were able to do that through a piece of legislation, a safe access law, that has been held as being charter-compliant.

A similar principle, in my view, has been applied to this legislation, albeit federally, which will apply across the country. Of course, this is not a provincial offence but a criminal offence. However, the aim and the purpose is the same, which is to create safety around specific important places of worship, such as synagogues, mosques, churches, gurdwaras and mandirs. Also, most importantly, it would give an opportunity to individuals to access those places of worship or other important institutions. This is about individual rights.

Government Orders

Another example I will give that I have been quite concerned about in my community has to do with schools. We have had multiple instances in Ottawa Centre, in my community, where an elementary school has been used as a site for people to protest around gender identity. They felt that somehow kids were being brainwashed, that they should not be taught about gender identity and that they should not get an education around health and sexual well-being. They have been using an elementary school as a site of protest, which is highly inappropriate. If people want to protest a curriculum, they should go to the ministry of education or go to the school board's office to protest.

This is an important piece of legislation. This is a piece of legislation that my constituents have been asking for, for some time. In fact, I started working with them prior to the last federal election. I worked extremely hard to make sure that it would be in the platform of my party, the Liberal Party of Canada. I spoke about it during the election many times. I was really happy to see that it would be a part of Bill C-9, one of the earliest pieces of legislation that the government tabled.

However, in my view, the bill has been dragged all this time by unnecessary filibustering by the opposition. It is highly unacceptable. In fact, it is perpetuating an unsafe environment. We need to make sure that we pass laws like Bill C-9 as quickly as possible, because this is not a partisan issue. This is a matter of making sure that together we are protecting our communities.

I urge all members of the House, particularly my Conservative colleagues who talk a lot about hate crimes, and rightly so, to support Bill C-9 and support this motion, so that we can help build safer communities for everyone in our country.

• (1525)

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say perfectly clearly what Conservatives have said since the very beginning of the Bill C-9 discussion, which is that we stand united against hate. However, we cannot protect any community from hate with legislation that infringes on their rights. That is why Bill C-9 has been denounced in whole or in part by 350 Muslim organizations this morning, by the Rabbinical Council of Toronto, by the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, by the United Church and by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Why does the member think that these concerns are unwarranted, when representatives of virtually every faith community in Canada have said that Bill C-9 will infringe on their religious liberties?

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, just like the member opposite, I have been meeting with many faith groups, and I have shared with them the same information I will share now.

We have something called the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Religious rights are protected within the charter. I think that relying on some sort of an exemption, which may have been created before the charter existed, is really misleading folks. What we need to focus on is that the charter has very robust protections when it comes to freedom of religion. Bill C-9 would not infringe upon that right whatsoever.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would be curious to know what my colleague's definition of "freedom" is.

There is an expression in Quebec, and I imagine it is used elsewhere: One person's freedom ends where another's begins. When people can commit a crime and justify hatred with religious texts, are they not infringing on the freedom of others?

Ultimately, there is a collective issue at stake here. Does it not involve the public interest?

[*English*]

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, the most incredible thing about this country is that we always find a way to make sure that everybody's freedoms are protected. That is what the charter tries to do. It protects the rights and freedoms of people to make sure we can find that perfect space where we can all live in harmony, which is sometimes challenging to do. What we are trying to do is protect the cultural rights of people, which are embedded within the fundamental values essential to Canada and written in the charter. By working together, we can make sure we continue to build a harmonious society.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-9 is a very serious piece of legislation that deals with combatting hate. The Conservative misinformation that gets pumped out through social media is very harmful.

Today, whether it is with respect to a church, a mosque, a gurdwara or a synagogue, nothing that is taking place today would be prevented in any fashion whatsoever with the passage of Bill C-9. That is an absolute truth. The Charter of Rights guarantees religious freedoms.

I wonder if my colleague could provide his thoughts on the damage caused by the misleading information that is coming out of the Conservative caucus.

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for raising a very important point. The games that the Conservatives are playing are very dangerous because they are making our communities and our society even more insecure at this moment.

All the Jewish community groups have been asking for this legislation. They support this legislation. They want this legislation to be passed. As we are seeing the rise of anti-Semitism, they are asking us to make sure that we take every step necessary to protect our places of worship. That is what we are trying to do. By impeding and delaying the bill, they are making our communities unsafe.

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the Liberals respond to the arguments and the debate all day long. They keep insisting that nothing will change with respect to religious speech and religious institutions. If nothing is changing, why remove the exemption in the first place?

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● (1530)

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, there is obviously a very serious divide within the Conservative Party, as there are some who support the bill and others who oppose it. By bringing these arguments forward, its members are delaying the safety of society.

We have something called the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, which protects everybody's religious freedoms. The charter remains in place.

Andrew Lawton: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there may have been some background noise, but I believe the member said that the Conservatives are divided. Unlike the Liberals, we all stand for free speech.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter related to the Standing Orders, but a matter of debate.

Pauline Rochefort (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to follow in the footsteps of my hon. colleague from Ottawa Centre.

I rise today to speak to Bill C-9, the combatting hate act, and on the notice given to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights this morning. I would like to start by addressing specific concerns with Bill C-9 that have been raised in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming. I would then like to explain why I am supporting Bill C-9 and why it is important for the bill to come before the House of Commons at this time.

In recent months, many citizens from my riding have contacted my office with letters, telephone calls and emails claiming that reading, teaching or discussing religious texts or beliefs would become hate speech under Bill C-9. They even claimed that pastors would no longer be able to read certain sections of the Bible out loud and that religious images would not be allowed in the schools their children attend. I would like to thank the residents of Nipissing—Timiskaming for reaching out and expressing themselves. I would also like to thank those who took the time to meet with me to explain their views.

Fortunately for all concerned, Bill C-9 is not about limiting our ability to peacefully pray, preach, interpret scripture or gather in the community to express our religious beliefs. It is not about preventing a pastor from reading out certain sections of the Bible. In fact, following the passage of Bill C-9, religious services and ceremonies in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming would continue just as they are proceeding now. That is because the right to express our faith is fully protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Under our charter, the expression of sincerely held religious beliefs will never be a crime.

What I think has made religious leaders and people in our communities a bit nervous is that there is a clause, the good-faith clause, present in the Criminal Code that would be removed as part of the amendments proposed to the bill. The clause was enacted in 1974, and in the 55 years it has been active, it has never been successfully used because courts have said the defence is redundant.

Sincerely held religious beliefs communicated accurately and in good faith will never constitute the promotion of hate. This good-faith clause was further rendered unnecessary, or as I say, obsolete,

when in 1982, Canada approved the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is why the good-faith clause would be removed as part of a revision process for the Criminal Code.

It is in section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that our freedom of conscience and religion is guaranteed. It protects our right to hold, openly declare and manifest beliefs through worship, practice and teaching. The Supreme Court of Canada, in its interpretation of the charter, has long made clear that expressing sincerely held religious beliefs, even when those beliefs are very controversial, does not constitute the promotion of hatred.

Nonetheless, people are worried, and it is important to know that. That is why I thank the many residents of Nipissing—Timiskaming who have expressed their concerns, and in turn, I am very happy to advise that they have been heard.

After listening to feedback from religious leaders and parishioners, people from across Canada, an amendment has been proposed to the legislation that adds a certainty clause clarifying that peaceful religious expression is not captured by the legislation. This amendment would further reassure people what Canadian courts have consistently recognized, which is that peaceful practice and expression of religion are fully protected under the charter.

This is what good governance is all about. It is about listening to citizens, consultations and improved legislation. That is why I fully support Bill C-9. In a nutshell, for me, it is all about tackling that ugly, hate-motivated intimidation or unacceptable, hate-motivated violence that we are seeing in certain Canadian communities. To do that, the legislation would introduce three measures.

First, the legislation would create a new hate crime offence to be added to existing criminal acts when an act has been committed because of hatred. Moving forward, when a criminal act, such as an assault or vandalism, is committed, it would allow further prosecution if it was done because of hatred. It would also make the offence more serious. I should point out that, as my colleague has said, hatred has been defined by the Supreme Court of Canada, and it is being codified in the proposed Criminal Code amendment.

● (1535)

The second aspect of the legislation is that it targets the deliberate promotion of hatred through extremist symbols that are used to spread violence and violent ideas. At the same time, it includes clear exceptions for legitimate use, such as education or historical discussion. The intention is not to censor discussion, but to prevent the deliberate promotion of hatred.

Third, it would strengthen protections for places of worship, churches, schools and community centres by making it a criminal offence to intimidate or obstruct people from entering those places. Finally, as mentioned, it would add a “greater certainty” clause that would clarify that peaceful religious expression is not captured by the legislation.

For me, this is good legislation that is required, and I will say why. In recent years, hate crimes have more than doubled across Canada. Police services across our country are sounding the alarm, but police departments alone cannot solve the problem. They need a Criminal Code that has their back, a Criminal Code that provides clarity about what a hate crime is, a Criminal Code that would enable them to pursue charges and ensure that it would lead to prosecution. In my province of Ontario, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police is calling for clarity and consistency in how hate crimes are defined and classified. In other words, they want Bill C-9, as do legal experts and prosecutors.

That is why I tell my colleagues that as a government, we have an obligation to give the professionals who are protecting our communities the tools they need to do their job, but more so, as a government, we have an obligation to ensure that Canadians right across the land are protected from intimidation and violence because of their religious beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation or simply who they are.

While I realize this is a sensitive piece of legislation, at the same time, I think it is a grave error to be obstructing this legislation or distorting the facts about Bill C-9. That is why I supported this very important motion this morning. This will provide further opportunities for us, as a government, to examine the legislation, propose amendments and, hopefully, see it go to the Senate where it will again be further examined and debated.

I will close by thanking the 30 expert witnesses who came before the justice committee and provided expert opinions. I also thank the priests, parishioners and the citizens of Nipissing—Timiskaming who provided their comments. I stated that I will be voting in favour of the bill because I believe it would ensure the very thing that Nipissing—Timiskaming residents want, which is to live, worship, learn and gather in our communities, as they are doing now and can continue to do, free of fear, intimidation and violence motivated by hate.

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague this: Do you agree with or denounce what the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture said when he stated that prosecutors should have the discretion to press charges on some passages from Leviticus and Romans?

• (1540)

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind members to be careful when using the word “you”. They should direct their questions and comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for Rural Development.

Pauline Rochefort: Mr. Speaker, I sense that my colleague would like to draw me into debate. While I agree that debate in Parliament is essential, for me, in the spirit of the motion that was passed this morning, what is most important today is to reflect on our duties as parliamentarians.

As I look around my riding, what I believe is most important is for parliamentarians to do their job. The question that has been posed has been answered at committee. It has been discussed. For me, it is about moving forward. That is what the citizens in my col-

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league's riding expect, and that is what the citizens in my riding expect.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's previous question is a good example of what we have been experiencing with Bill C-9. I would describe it as blatant misinformation. I have received calls at my office from people who have a very narrow view of the purpose of the bill.

Hate speech is hate speech. We need to make that clear to people. We are not taking away anyone's right to practise their faith. We are not taking away anyone's right to demonstrate their faith. We are asking people not to use their faith to justify hate speech based on very specific guidelines.

Why would any politician think it is a good idea to spread misinformation to the public and create concerns. I cannot understand it. Perhaps my colleague could explain it to us.

Pauline Rochefort: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's question. It is a very good one. I am wondering the same thing.

This is critical in our communities, in his as in mine. Legal experts, prosecutors and police officers are saying that they need these changes to the Criminal Code to combat hate in our communities. We have before us a bill that brings balance. It strikes a balance between respecting the freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and protecting Canadians from hate-motivated intimidation and violence.

Like my colleague, I do not understand why some members would not support this bill.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to be perfectly clear, the Conservative Party of Canada is literally sending out thousands of emails, spreading misinformation and using fear in order to raise additional money for its political party.

I would argue that the Conservatives have taken the position that under no circumstances are they going to allow the legislation to pass, even though a majority, which means the Liberals and other parties, have said that we want to see progress. We want to see the legislation ultimately pass. As a result, because of the Conservatives' ongoing filibustering, the only way to get the legislation to pass is to bring in the motion that we are debating today.

Could the member could pick up on her point that it is time for us to move forward with the legislation?

Pauline Rochefort: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I was surprised by the amount of disinformation, or distortion of the facts, which I think is probably a better term, that came forward from my riding and that has circulated in our community and in our country.

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For me, the real issue is that communities across Canada are experiencing hate incidents, and they are asking Parliament to act, which I think is our job. We need to remember that Bill C-9 would strengthen protections for Canadians, and it is respecting the rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is truly striking an incredible balance.

I encourage everyone to support Bill C-9.

• (1545)

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly an honour to rise and speak on behalf of the good people of Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna. I am also pleased to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

I have been fortunate to have spent enough time in this place to have sat on both sides of the House, which I consider a great honour. Over my time in this place, I have witnessed a great many bills come and go. Some of them make it to royal assent and others do not, for a variety of different reasons. Sometimes there will be consensus on a bill, when a majority of members of this place support a bill to move forward. However, more often than not, there will be disagreement.

Usually, that disagreement might be based on ideology. However, from time to time there are also bills that come forward that are so controversial that they may draw serious concerns from all sides of the political spectrum. Bill C-9 is one of those bills.

As we were reminded yesterday in this place, in the speech from the member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, Bill C-9 has raised serious concerns from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Constitution Foundation, the Rabbinical Council of Toronto, the National Council of Canadian Muslims, the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and Egale Canada. I am sure all members would agree that this is a very diverse set of different organizations. That one single bill could unite so many of these different groups and organizations to raise very serious concerns should be an alarm bell for every member of this place, and even more so as some of these groups and organizations are intended to be better protected by the bill.

They are also sending a strong message to all of us, and members do not have to take my word for it. I am certain that every member in this place has similar concerns shared to them by their constituents. In fact, if there is one thing I can say, it is that of all those I have heard from in emails or phone calls, or with whom I've met in person, not one single person has ever said, "Bill C-9 gets it right. Please support it and pass it." Not one single person in my riding has said that to me. The only place I hear that is from Liberal MPs in this place, and that is really saying something. When some of the groups this bill seeks to protect say there are serious problems with the bill itself, I submit that we should all be listening.

However, the Liberals have now decided that they do not want to do that. They have decided that these groups and individuals do not deserve to be heard. We all know that is wrong, yet here we are again. I say "again" because, of course, that is how things would

often work under the former Liberal government. With the help of the NDP, the Liberals would ignore the concerns of everyday Canadians and say, "Trust us," and, "We know what is best for you," while they imposed one-size-fits-all, Ottawa-enforced solutions. We know how that approach worked out for the former Liberal prime minister and the former NDP leader, but this is not meant to be a history lesson. This is a bill that the Liberals like to tell us is from the new Liberal government, even though it is beginning to act and sound, quite frankly, a lot like the previous Liberal government.

Let us pause for a moment here. It is not a secret that we already have existing laws that can deal with hate and that are completely and totally ignored right now. There are laws that are in force. When those groups, and lately it is often Jewish Canadians, look to government for leadership, they are not getting answers, accountability or action. Instead, they are getting Bill C-9, which is a classic way for the government to attempt to say, "We are doing something, and this is what we are doing." It is a process, but there is nothing concrete.

As we all know, one of the most controversial parts of Bill C-9 is the proposal to remove the religious exemption clause. I think we can all agree on that. However, exemptions for "a legitimate purpose", such as an educational, artistic or journalistic purpose, would not be captured by this offence.

• (1550)

In other words, there is a recognition in this proposed legislation for exemptions, just no longer for religious reasons, despite charter protections to the contrary. I know Liberals will say, "That is not who we mean to target by targeting the religious exemption for elimination." For the purpose of this debate, suppose we were to give those Liberals the benefit of the doubt. The problem is that what the Liberals intend to happen in this proposed bill may not be what would end up happening once it becomes law.

When the Liberals changed the Criminal Code in provisions around bail, I am certain they did not intend those changes to result in a massive increase in serious crimes, yet that is precisely what occurred, as prolific offenders get the benefit of the doubt and are back on the street again on bail instead of being in jail. The principle of restraint is a principle that has created a big problem. We in the official opposition did warn the Liberals about changing that. We all know what happened. They simply discounted and ignored, arrogantly saying, "Everything you are saying is wrong and we are right," a typical Liberal response in regard to these kinds of concerns.

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In many ways, we are here again, like it is Groundhog Day, where it is not just the official opposition Conservatives who are warning the Liberals about this bill. It is a huge group of different organizations, all saying the same thing, because the Liberals continue to refuse to listen. They continue to push this into law, and then it is out of our hands as members of Parliament. Once that happens, it is in our communities and, again, it could be weaponized against the very people it is said to protect. More often than not, we are seeing that enforcement and public safety have become increasingly selective based on what group yells the loudest. That is not to mention judicial activism, where some rulings are raising serious concerns.

This is our current environment when it comes to enforcement, prosecution and sentencing. This is creating more division and, I would submit, a less tolerant attitude among many Canadians. Targeting faith, even though the stated intent is not to do so, would carry serious consequences and repercussions. Keep in mind that it is the very groups and organizations this bill is supposed to be trying to protect that are sounding the alarm bell on this. Why would we not want to listen?

In conclusion, while I would agree that the intent here is not nefarious but meant to be well-meaning, I submit that we need to take a step back and listen to those who are raising concerns. We need to address those concerns in a meaningful way. We cannot risk getting this bill wrong solely due to Liberal arrogance. We do not need more polarization, more weaponization or more divisiveness, all the things this bill could create more of if we do not get it right.

I met with a local pastoral association in my area of West Kelowna. The members of the association felt particularly targeted by this good-faith exemption being drawn out just for religious worship. They said, "It says 'academic', so a professor could say the same thing from the same holy book and receive a good-faith exemption. Someone could put on a play or put the same scripture on a painting and receive the exemption, but those people who are in a church in front of people of faith in pews, rather than students at a local university, could not." They feel targeted.

That is precisely why I will be voting against this bill, as every single constituent I have heard from has asked me to do. I would encourage the members of the government to listen to the concerns of their constituents as well and do likewise. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has listened today and taken my comments into account. I hope that those comments track with their own experience and that they will have a similar response to my own.

Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague across the way and always enjoy the conversations we have on a number of issues.

The religious exemption clause seems to be the basis for a lot of sensitivity in the House today. Would the member support the other measures in the bill as they currently exist if the clause pertaining to religious exemptions were removed? If so, would he also encourage his leader and his party to do the same?

• (1555)

Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the member has to say, and I am sure my mom probably sent him friendship cookies to

get him to say things like that publicly. I cannot see many other Liberal members saying that about me. The respect is mutual.

What I would simply say is that I have fundamental differences on Bill C-9. For example, the current law has it so that the Attorney General of Canada must give approval. That sets a very high bar. Unfortunately, as I said, there is divisiveness. In my province of British Columbia, there have been many divisive statements said by different ministers from the provincial government. We have seen where a former minister, a Jewish woman, was basically cast out of that caucus and cabinet for her viewpoints. Bringing it down to the attorney general level at the provincial level takes away a valuable safeguard. That is one of the principal reasons.

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna is a thoughtful and principled member of the House.

Dan Albas: He got the friendship cookies.

Harb Gill: No, Mr. Speaker, I did not get the cookies from his mom yet, but I am waiting.

Given my colleague's long-standing work on issues of government accountability and protecting Canadian values, can he share his perspective on Bill C-9 and what we should do to confront real hate while safeguarding the freedoms and the ability of people to express themselves in a thoughtful way without compromising their values.

Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, that member spent almost his full career in law enforcement. He knows how critically important it is for law and order to be expressed with clear rules and clear enforcement. As I have said, we have existing rules around violence and incitement. What we need is less talk from politicians and more backing of our police forces so they can make those charges, present the evidence and have the Crown prosecutors prosecute those who have threatened Canadians. Those who have harmed others need to be seen to be held accountable.

Right now, we have so much division because no one feels like anyone is in charge. We need to have law and order, and we need to have enforcement.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague is a serious member, so I am confident that he will respond with his usual seriousness.

I am wondering whether he truly believes, as some of his colleagues are suggesting, that under this legislation, people will no longer be allowed to quote specific passages from the Bible. Does he think it is the role of a legislator to spread misinformation, in the hope of creating discontent and, ultimately, causing people to lose confidence in the political system? I would like to hear his comments on that.

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Could some of the remarks made by his colleagues in committee and over the course of the day, suggesting that this bill would prevent people from quoting from the Bible, not have unintended consequences?

[English]

Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, it is a serious issue and a serious question, one that I will answer.

First of all, I believe that ultimately the changes promoted by the Bloc and the government that remove the good-faith clause when it comes to religious worship will inevitably be challenged in a court under the charter. I believe it will go from lower to higher courts, all the way to the Supreme Court. The challenge is that we will have an individual who has to go through the weight, burden and stress of defending their charter rights all the way through the system only to find out that this law was not well thought out and is not charter-compliant.

• (1600)

Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to speak in this incredible House on behalf of the good people of Calgary Midnapore. I cannot believe that this spring it is nine years that I have been in this chamber. I want to thank you so much for your support, Mr. Speaker, as I began this journey so long ago.

I have to say that it has been several years of wonder being here every day and not being able to believe that I am in this great House where so many incredible people have come before me. I am surrounded by outstanding individuals, and I am so excited about the future parliamentarians who will come after me.

However, within that time, as well as wonder, there has been some disappointment. Here today is a piece of that disappointment, because we are discussing closure. Closure is always disturbing and disappointing because it means that my voice is being silenced in speaking on behalf of the citizens of Calgary Midnapore. It also means that there are other members in the House who will not have the opportunity to speak on behalf of their constituents.

I have had many citizens reach out to me on Bill C-9 with their most grave concerns. It is quite sad that these expressions will not get the opportunity to come to light and to be expressed fully in the House. Unfortunately, this is a trend with the current government.

Another trend that I see with the government is that it can never seem to present a good piece of legislation without a poison pill.

The crux of Bill C-9 is that we are talking about obstructing access to religious institutions. Who could be opposed to the safety, welfare and well-being of those who want to practise their religious freedom at this time? There is a 67% increase in crimes targeting religion in 2023 compared to 2022. In 2024, 1,342 police-reported incidents were motivated by religion, which included 900 incidents against the Jewish population and 211 incidents against the Muslim population, and over 100 Christian churches have been burned or vandalized since 2021.

Bill C-9 was a piece of legislation that we could support and get behind, but the Liberal government did what it does. It played politics. It put in the poison pill of removing religious defence from the

Criminal Code. Why would the Liberals do that? Why would they remove freedom of expression of the most deepest and dearest sentiments of humans in existence?

They would do it for politics. They do not want this bill to pass unanimously. They do not want to see us working with them for Canadians and for the common good of Canada. This is a farce, and it does not elude them. It was planned intentionally for their hopeful political gain. They cannot put forward good legislation for the purpose of us all supporting good legislation. There must always be a poison pill.

My grandfather was from Bucha, Ukraine, which is where they found the mass graves. Ukrainian heritage has been a key part of my life since I was a little girl, whether my mum was making *pedaheh* and *kubasa*, or we were admiring the *paska* at family weddings in the beautiful shape of doves.

War came to Ukraine with tragedy and sadness. After contributing to Putin's war effort in supplying the turbine to export oil, the Liberal government had the good idea of a trade agreement, which was wonderful. It was an opportunity to show our support in the most tangible way possible: the economy. As Conservatives, we became excited at the prospect of supporting the bill. All of us would be working together for peace and democracy against one of the greatest dictators of our time. However, the Liberals placed a carbon tax in the bill, which their own government claimed to reverse, at least in principle, but at the time it was another poison pill. It was another measure deliberately placed by the Liberal government to give us, the Conservative Party of Canada, hesitation in supporting the legislation.

• (1605)

Again, the Liberals say they want us to work together. They claim we are obstructionist, but it is always deliberate and by their design, as I am explaining. They can never just present legislation that is good in its entirety for Canadians. They always have to have a poison pill because they want to play politics and they want to divide.

The Building Canada Act provides powers to get major projects approved in Canada, but it does not repeal Bill C-69 or Bill C-48, which would make it palatable to investors. That would have made it even easier for us as Conservatives to support it, even though we did. We gave them every opportunity to create prosperity in this great nation. In Bill C-8, they say they want to protect Canadians from cyber-threats, but their legislation would ultimately give the government the power to secretly cancel Canadians' Internet accounts. Again, they claim they are doing good, but there is always that poison pill.

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In Bill C-2, they tried to give Canada Post sweeping powers to open any piece of mail, any piece of mail in the land, an incredible invasion of privacy, an incredible invasion of communicator to receiver. They tried to do this and to ban cash payments of over \$10,000. It is cash, a way in which business has been done in this nation, a way in which commerce has been conducted, for forever. Conservatives forced the government into splitting the bill into two pieces to take out the poison pills.

It is these games that hurt Canadians, in delayed legislation, in amendments, in going back and forth to committees, in discussing these things and, therefore, in delayed outcomes for Canadians on things that would improve, fundamentally, the lives of Canadians. It is all a result of putting these poison pills in pieces of legislation. They really do not want us coming together for the good of Canadians. They want to divide and Bill C-9 is just another example of this. It is intentional.

It is never about 95% of the bill. There are always the good clauses, the positive clauses. We can point to good things being done for Canadians. Rather, it is always about that 5%, that one little hitch, that little poison pill that we simply cannot pass. It is like we are eating a hot dog, and then, all of a sudden, we hit that hard piece, and it just ruins the hot dog, or we are eating an olive and, all of a sudden, we hit that little piece of pit, which just ruins the experience, the item, in its entirety. Most of it is good. It was a really good hot dog or a really good olive. It is that small piece that ruins the item in its entirety. It is the same with Liberal legislation.

Liberals say it is for the good of Canadians. They say they want us to work together. It is not true. There is always, with the Liberal government, a poison pill. We see this as well within Bill C-9. We can support Canadians being safe in their places of worship. We want Canadians to be free to go to their places of worship, to be able to worship who they want, how they want and when they want. We absolutely support that within Bill C-9.

We cannot support the criminalization of merely offensive speech. We cannot leave up for interpretation what is motivated by hatred. We cannot condemn Canadians for speaking their utmost and sacred truths. Apparently, we, the elected representatives, can be silenced for attempting to stand up for and defend those who agree with us in these sentiments. That is shameful.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member needs to have a reality check. Quite frankly, I would love and the government would love to see unanimous support for the legislation. In fact, prior to the election, under a standing committee, we had Conservative members working with Liberals in the previous administration, saying that hate legislation was something that was necessary.

We then fast-forward to today. I make reference to the Conservative email sent out from the Conservative Party. It says, referring to the government, that the goal is to “expose people of faith to criminal prosecution for the simple act of quoting from their own sacred texts.” It is loaded with misinformation. That is what we hear from the Conservative Party. If they really believe in dealing with hate crimes, then maybe they should—

• (1610)

The Deputy Speaker: I have to interrupt the member to give a chance for the member for Calgary Midnapore to respond.

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I do not appreciate being called delusional by the individual across the way. I actually think this is a form of gaslighting. I had the good fortune to meet with a member who fights for the Cuban diaspora yesterday. This is really how all democracies start to fail, by a government questioning people when they know their truth and they know what they stand for. This is what the government does consistently, both in Bill C-9 and in this chamber here today. It is disgraceful.

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not one person has emailed me or contacted me to ask me to support this bill. In fact, I have more Liberal members emailing me asking me to cross the floor than to support this bill. On the other hand, many have phoned me to oppose it. This does not sound like a bill anybody wants. The member across the aisle claims that this is all a plot by the Conservative Party to raise funds. He has a point, because it is a great fundraiser. I actually have people phoning me to say they will donate if I can stop this bill. If it is a fundraising tool, it is a pretty good one. I cannot stop it. Only the Liberals can stop it. The Liberals keep telling us this bill is harmless, yet they also claim it is crucial.

I am wondering if the member could speak a little about this.

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee very much for his integrity and his principle, because I am sure everyone has seen his strong sentiments online about how he would never consider abandoning his principles or his values, which of course is something members of the government do on a pretty consistent basis. I feel that even in asking me this question, he has given pause for consideration for the response himself. When I talk about being in wonder and in awe here of the great people who are with me, it certainly includes this member for Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2024, Adil Charkaoui recited a prayer in which he called for the death of Jews. Quebec's director of criminal and penal prosecutions found that it could not lay charges because of the religious exemption in the Criminal Code.

Does my colleague agree with that?

Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, it is always important to ask questions, but the most important principle is that we are here to protect people of different religions.

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As I said, it is good to protect people who want to go to certain places to practise their religion. However, I think the problem is that, even though they have the right to practise their religion, they must also have the right to express their religion.

I believe my colleague and I disagree on that, unfortunately.

[English]

James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

First let me say that, as always, it is a privilege to stand in the House and represent the great people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, whom I have the honour of representing. I rise today to speak in support of the motion before the House. This debate is about more than procedure. It is about how Parliament chooses to do its work. It is about whether we allow legislation to move forward after thorough study, or whether we allow it to be stalled indefinitely through procedural obstruction.

Bill C-9, the combatting hate act, has now been before Parliament for months. It was introduced in the House of Commons on September 19, 2025. It is now March. It received second reading debate. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, where witnesses appeared, experts testified, communities shared their experiences, amendments were proposed and clauses were debated. In total, Parliament has now spent more than 30 hours debating and studying this legislation. That is not rushed consideration but serious parliamentary scrutiny. This is exactly how our legislative process is supposed to work, but there comes a moment when scrutiny must lead to decision.

Parliament cannot function if debate never leads to a vote. Opposition parties play a critical role in our democracy. Their responsibility is to challenge legislation, question its provisions and propose improvements. That is healthy, and it is necessary. That is how good legislation becomes better legislation, but there is a difference between debate and obstruction. Debate is when members raise arguments, propose amendments and explain their position to Canadians.

Obstruction is something very different. Obstruction is when procedural tactics are used to prevent Parliament from doing its job. Obstruction is when hours are consumed not discussing the bill itself but discussing procedural manoeuvres. Obstruction is when legislation cannot move forward, even after extensive study. This is what we have seen repeatedly during the study of Bill C-9. The opposition parties have prolonged debate in ways to prevent clause-by-clause review from progressing. Every hour spent on procedural delay is an hour in which Parliament is prevented from completing its work. This is the simple reality.

Members of the House are free to disagree with legislation. They are free to oppose it and to vote against it. That is their right. That is democracy. If a member believes a clause should not be adopted, they can vote against that clause. If a member believes an amendment should be rejected, they can vote against the amendment. If a member believes the entire bill should fail, they can vote against the bill. This is how the legislature functions. Members make their arguments and cast their vote, and Parliament reaches a decision.

What is not responsible is attempting to delay the legislative process indefinitely through procedural tactics. That does not strengthen legislation, it does not improve legislation and it does not serve Canadians.

The legislation before us addresses an issue that communities across Canada have been raising for years. Hate-motivated intimidation and harassment have become increasingly visible in our communities. We have seen individuals threatened as they approach their places of worship. We have seen hateful symbols displayed outside schools and community centres. We have seen people intimidated simply for being part of a particular religious, cultural or identity group.

These are not theoretical concerns. These are real experiences reported by Canadians across the country. Jewish communities have spoken about threats directed at their synagogues. We have only to look at this past weekend in my city of Toronto. Muslim communities have reported intimidation outside mosques, Black Canadians have spoken about racist harassment, Asian Canadians have faced hostility fuelled by misinformation and prejudice, and LGBTQ Canadians have experienced intimidation in spaces meant to provide safety and support.

These incidents undermine the sense of safety that Canadians expect in their daily lives, and Bill C-9 responds to those concerns. It strengthens the Criminal Code to address intimidation and obstruction directed at spaces primarily used by identifiable groups. It creates clearer tools for law enforcement when crimes are motivated by hatred toward a person's identity. It addresses the public display of symbols used to promote hatred and intimidate communities. These measures respond directly to what community organizations, law enforcement agencies and human rights groups have been asking Parliament to address.

● (1615)

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights examined these issues in depth. In December 2024, the committee released its report on heightened anti-Semitism in Canada and how to confront it. The report contained recommendations aimed at strengthening Canada's response to hate-motivated crimes and intimidation. Many of those recommendations are reflected in Bill C-9. In other words, the legislation before us today is not the product of a sudden idea. It reflects a parliamentary study, expert testimony and the voices of communities who have asked Parliament to act.

Government Orders

Some of the debate surrounding this bill has focused on the removal of the religious exemption provision in the Criminal Code. Let us address that clearly. Freedom of religion in Canada is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That protection is fundamental and is not changing. Courts in Canada have consistently confirmed that hate propaganda offences require a very high legal threshold. That threshold requires proof that someone wilfully promoted hatred against an identifiable group. Reading scripture does not meet that threshold. Teaching religious doctrine does not meet that threshold. Practising one's faith does not meet that threshold. Those freedoms remain fully protected under the charter.

Nevertheless, concerns were raised by some faith communities about how the legislation might be interpreted. When these concerns were raised, Parliament responded responsibly. A "for greater certainty" clause was introduced to explicitly confirm that peaceful religious expression is not captured by the legislation. That is how legislative collaboration should work. Concerns were raised, members worked together, clarifications were introduced and legislation was strengthened. Collaboration requires participation from all sides. It requires members to bring forward amendments, to debate provisions and to vote, but collaboration does not mean using procedural tactics to prevent Parliament from completing its work.

There is another important point that must be understood. When legislation is stalled, the consequences extend beyond a single bill. Parliament has a significant legislative agenda. There are bills that address public policy, justice reform, economic policy and issues that Canadians expect Parliament to address. When one bill is repeatedly delayed through obstruction, it consumes time that could otherwise be used to advance other legislation. It slows the entire legislative process, which affects Parliament's ability to respond to the needs of Canadians.

The motion before us today is not extraordinary but simply ensures that the committee can complete its clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-9 and that the House can proceed to a vote. Debate has taken place. Studies have taken place. Witnesses have been heard. Amendments have been proposed. The next step in the legislative process is decision. That is what this motion allows Parliament to do. Members of the House will have the opportunity to vote. They will have the opportunity to support the legislation or oppose it, but Canadians deserve to see Parliament reach a decision.

The issue before us ultimately comes down to responsibility. As legislators, we have a responsibility to debate legislation thoroughly, to listen to witnesses and to examine the amendments, but we also have a responsibility to complete our work. Communities across the country are asking for stronger protections against hate and intimidation. They are asking Parliament to respond. They are asking Parliament to act. After months of study and debate, it is time for Parliament to fulfill that responsibility. It is time to move forward. It is time to vote.

• (1620)

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member, who is the chair of the justice committee, for his speech, although I note that when he talks about the hours of debate on Bill C-9, he misses the fact that we have had no opportunity to hear witnesses on the removal of the religious de-

fence, because it was snuck in as an amendment thanks to an agreement between the Liberal and Bloc members.

Once again, we have a Liberal saying that people should not worry, that their religious freedoms would not be touched because the charter protects religious freedoms.

Let me ask this very pointedly. The member's predecessor as committee chair was promoted to cabinet a couple of weeks after he said that it would be, in his view, justifiable for prosecutors to charge people for quoting certain verses of scripture. Does he denounce that comment?

James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I work with him on the committee, and at times I enjoy it.

The simple fact remains that when this bill is passed in its current form, I will be allowed to go to church and my colleagues will be allowed to go to their synagogues or their mosques. Nothing changes. Any notion that this bill would somehow restrict people from practising their religion or reading from scripture is absurd. It is misinformation, full stop.

• (1625)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on two points very quickly. One is the motivation issue. I have received an email that has been shared with literally thousands of Canadians, sent by the Conservative Party of Canada, that is clearly meant to do two things. One is to raise money, because it is asking for a donation. The second is to plant fear in the minds of individuals concerned about faith.

The legislation and the Charter of Rights protect freedom of religion. It is time for the legislation to proceed. A majority of MPs want the legislation to continue. A smaller number of MPs, in the Conservative Party alone, want to prevent it, and they can stop it by just continuing to talk endlessly. That is why the motion is necessary, and I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on that.

James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. The people who have not had the benefit of watching the committee go through this process should go back and review it, because the Conservative members on the committee do not even agree. They come to committee, meeting after meeting, with different approaches and conflicting opinions. This is simply designed to be political, in my opinion.

With respect to the emails that are going out to raise money, to my colleague's point, a number of people have approached me about what they perceive to be in the bill but is just completely false. This is because they have been told things that are not true, and we have a responsibility as parliamentarians, whether we agree with legislation or not, to act responsibly and to reveal information that is accurate, all the time.

Government Orders

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard all day long that our charter rights would not be violated, but the Conservatives brought an amendment to the committee that said that nothing in this section is to be interpreted or applied so as to interfere with the freedom of expression or the freedom of religion, and the Liberals voted against it. Why is that?

James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member should review my speech and reflect upon my comments about the “for greater certainty” provision. This amendment is designed to dispel all this misinformation. There is nothing in the bill, and I will say it again, that would prohibit anybody from practising their religion in any way, shape or form.

These amendments were designed to obfuscate, to misdirect and to lead people down a road in the wrong direction. I encourage people who believe what the member just said to go read the bill.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I just want a chance to ask the hon. member if he is aware that it is not just the Conservatives who do not like the bill. The Greens will vote against it as well.

James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, there was not really a question there, and there was not really any new information. As I also said in my speech, members are entitled to debate, suggest amendments and vote the way they want to.

Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always proud to rise in the House on behalf of the people of Winnipeg South Centre. Today I rise as a Jew, as a member of Parliament and, perhaps most important, as a Canadian, to speak to Bill C-9.

I have enough humility, I hope, to recognize that it is members not just of one party but of all parties who have allowed at times the conversation in this debate to be filled with perhaps a bit more hot air than is productive for the discussion that Canadians would like us to have. I hope today in my remarks to reflect honestly and transparently about what I have heard from the community I represent.

My great-grandparents came to Canada in the early 20th century, escaping the pogroms of Russia. They did so because they were victimized as Jews and were searching for a better life. This is a story that has played out across countless communities and is an experience that individuals who have called Canada home for some time hold as the foundation of why this place is so dear and special to them.

Unfortunately, today, much of what my ancestors experienced and people who have come from other communities are experiencing in this country is a similar type of victimization. I think of the Jewish community that I come from in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre, the synagogue I attend and attended as a kid and the high school I went to and taught at in Winnipeg, which had swastikas spray-painted on its windows just a few weeks ago. I stood with Jewish community members in the GTA just a few days ago and saw bullet holes ripped through front doors, reminiscent of a very dark period in our time that none of us want to see relived.

The Muslim community across the country, but particularly in my hometown of Winnipeg, has faced its fair share of discrimina-

tion. Recently the owner of Habibiz Café, a shawarma shop, of which there are so many across our country, woke up to a message of hate. Christians in this country, as well as members of other faith-based communities have been the victims of discrimination based on their beliefs. Bill C-9 would allow us to accomplish a pathway, through the strengthening of laws, to allowing us to reduce some of the severity by ensuring that we increase the structure of our laws.

Having said all this, I have a great degree of respect for many of my colleagues across the way and many from other parties and in my own party who come from places of faith. I deeply appreciate it, notwithstanding the fact that I am not particularly religious. I very much see how so many people in this country, whatever religion their faith rests in, have it as a core part of their identity and that it serves a critical purpose in who they are as individuals.

I have a tremendous amount of respect for that, which is why I understand the elevation of the discourse around the religious exemption that has been debated in particular. This is part of the reason I asked my colleague a few moments ago if he would support this piece of legislation should it be amended.

As my colleague who spoke before me noted, there are already a number of different ways in which we see protections for people that are embedded in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in current Canadian law. I could never in good conscience support a piece of legislation that I felt would hinder the ability for my colleagues, my constituents, my friends, my family members and Canadians across the country to practise their faith.

The degree to which we are talking about somebody having to be prosecuted by the arm of the law for using a text for hate is significant. Nonetheless, I do appreciate that we have the opportunity in this beautiful country of ours to have this conversation. It is so representative of the strength of Canadian parliamentary democracy.

• (1630)

However, although coming from conversations and experiences I had with Canadians across the country as I had the opportunity to travel in a variety of capacities, my support for Bill C-9 comes primarily from the conversations I had with my own community in Winnipeg South Centre.

I am fortunate to represent the largest Jewish population in western Canada, and after October 7, for reasons I am sure many have opinions on and would be a debate that we could have unto itself, there has been a significant rise in anti-Semitism. One of the first things my constituents, particularly from the Jewish community but not only them, have said they need is a strengthening of laws. Here are some examples.

There is something called Folklorama, which is a wonderful event that happens in Winnipeg every year. I encourage all members to come pay us a visit. It is where people from countries around the world have an opportunity to come and learn about the culture, language, dance, food, different goods that are sold and stories that are told about where people come from.

Last year at the Israeli pavilion, children, whether they were Jews or not, who walked into that space to learn about a different culture, were told by protesters that Hamas was coming for them. They were told to go back to Europe and were spit on. They were told they were child murderers. This happened as they walked into the celebratory space, and some were as young as my niece, who is five years old.

I am also thinking about the University of Winnipeg students who, after October 7, had to walk onto a campus that had Hamas flags flying. They had to walk into spaces that are meant to be safe but were not able to do so, or certainly did not feel comfortable doing so, quite understandably, by virtue of the fact that there was a permissive ability under law for some of this to take place.

With this feedback, we went to the drawing board and had a conversation about what we could do to ensure that we strengthen protections. One of the things I find so critically important about Bill C-9 is that it would take some concrete action to help prevent these things. Hate symbols are not something that ought to be able to fly proudly in our streets. It is time, I believe, that we take action in making it something that would be in breach of the law. In addition, going back to the example I used of Folklorama in Winnipeg, nobody should be intimidated going into a space when they are there to worship, to celebrate their faith or to honour their identity or the roots of their community.

One of the things the community has asked me to relay during the course of my remarks here in Ottawa, not just today but also in the days that have passed, is that the legislation is something they believe they need in order to be safer. Given what we have seen over the course of the past couple of weeks in particular, I think it is quite an appropriate time to move forward with this piece of legislation.

One of the things that has happened from time to time in the House, particularly in the context of this debate, is that we often speak broadly about what one community wants versus what another wants. I say with humility that it is important to recognize that none of us, myself included, has a monopoly on the way a particular community feels. There are Jews in this country who support the bill. There are Jews in this country who have some questions about it. There are Muslims in this country who support the bill. There are Muslims in this country who have some questions about it. There are some Christians in this country about whom I would say the same thing, and the list would go on and on.

I have very much appreciated the opportunity in the hallowed halls of the chamber to have a respectful and peaceful conversation about what is in the best interests of our country. However, it is my belief, quite firmly, that Bill C-9 is an opportunity for us, at a time of great division, danger, fear and anxiety in our society, to protect the communities that need protection the most.

• (1635)

Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the last point my colleague across the way made. He said there were Muslims who support the bill and Muslims who do not, Christians who support it and Christians who do not, and members of the Jewish community who support it and members who do not.

Government Orders

Would the member acknowledge that the members on this side of the House offered to split the bill into those areas that were supported and not controversial, and those areas to be set aside for further debate, the exact points that are controversial, in order to put in place the protections that I believe those members of the community who support the bill want?

Would he further acknowledge that there was no consultation with Canadians after the Liberal Party's joining with the Bloc Québécois to remove the religious exemption?

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, I have a great degree of respect for my colleague across the way. We have many people in common in the city of Winnipeg, and I believe him to be a very thoughtful and honourable person.

Having followed some of the proceedings of the justice committee and having had a chance to review the bill and the amendments that were made recently, I do believe that much of the concern has been addressed. We can always have a debate, of course, and it is usually a subjective one, about how much debate is enough debate and how much consultation is enough consultation.

I do believe, given the urgency of the need for this legislation right now, that an appropriate amount of discussion has taken place in this country and that Canadians will have the opportunity to tell us how they feel.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debates all day and I want to say one thing: There is an immeasurable gap between what I am hearing and Quebec's position. People are probably familiar with the expression “the two solitudes”.

When it comes to religion, clearly not many members of the House are in tune with what Quebecers think. There may be a few among the Liberals, but certainly not among the Conservatives. There is a major distinction made in Quebec: religion belongs in the private sphere, while the public sphere, the civic sphere, is reserved for politics.

In the debate we are having, it is as if religion could dictate to politics how it should behave. Not only are we having this debate, which is surreal to me, but the debate is in bad faith on the part of the Conservatives. It is the epitome of bad faith, as if this bill were going to prevent people from professing their faith.

Here is the question I have for my colleague. I am wondering what interest the Conservative Party has in acting this way.

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether I can explain where the interests of my colleagues in the official opposition lie. However, as I said during my speech, I think it is important to maintain a respectful tone and style of debate in the House. Over the past few months, in the course of this debate, I believe that our discussions have at times taken a rather more partisan turn. The tone used was unnecessary and did not serve us effectively in the House.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we are to talk about the motion before us today that is being debated, the fact is that we have been debating Bill C-9 for many months now. It has been at committee for endless hours. I think it is over 30 hours now. We have a majority of members of Parliament who ultimately want to see the advancement of the legislation.

I understand the Conservative Party members do not want to see the legislation pass. They could talk indefinitely, which would guarantee it would never pass. I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on why it is important that we respect the majority of the members of Parliament.

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, as I referenced in my speech a number of times, we are so fortunate to live in this country, with its strong parliamentary system rooted in the democratic principles that allow us to have these conversations. We have had them and we are obviously continuing to have them, and I do not think this discussion will end even with the passage of Bill C-9, which is quite important. Ongoing conversation and reflection about the impact that laws have in the country is critical to the health of our democracy, and I look forward to continuing this debate while it is in this chamber.

Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong.

I want to start my speech by taking a moment to address the horrific events that took place in Toronto and in Thornhill last weekend. The doors of houses of worship were pierced by a gunman's bullets in the middle of the night. There is nothing more cowardly, more shameful and more un-Canadian than targeting a sacred place under the cover of darkness. It is meant to strike fear in the hearts of those who use that place, in this case the Jewish community in their central place of worship, and intimidate an entire community on the Sabbath, the most sacred day of the week. The Prime Minister and his ministers are quick to run to the podium after events like this to offer things like thoughts, prayers and condemnation, but it always stops after those kind words and it never gets to decisive action.

The government will claim that this is not who we are, but it is exactly who we have become in this country. It is terrorism meant to terrorize a community. With two synagogues being shot on Saturday, one being shot last Monday and businesses being vandalized every week, we see there is a tide of anti-Semitism and hatred that the Liberals have allowed to crest over the last two and a half years. We have to admit that this is very much who we are now. This has become a fact of everyday life in Canada. We are number one in the world when it comes to violence against Jewish institutions.

The Liberal government, unfortunately, wants Canadians to believe that this bill before us, Bill C-9, is the silver bullet that will fix all of this. It is not. It is a cynical sales pitch in the face of what is a crisis in this country. Nothing in this bill would have prevented these shootings or the violence that we have watched unfold in our streets for the better part of the last two and a half years.

Do not be fooled by the legislative theatre or the answers to the questions that we hear in this place. First and foremost, nothing, absolutely nothing has changed a week after those shootings. There has not been a single dollar of more security funding and not one more deportation of the terrorists that we have in our country. Nothing has changed. More importantly, the solution that they have peddled shamelessly is one that will, no doubt, be weaponized against the very community that it purports to protect. It also would not have prevented the burning of churches, the targeting of temples, the desecration of mosques or any of the atrocities that we have seen under the watch of the Liberal government and through the callousness of its divisive politics over the last number of years.

Shooting a bullet into a synagogue is already illegal. Spray-painting a swastika onto a school is already illegal. Covering one's face and chanting genocidal slogans in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood is already illegal. What is missing is the enforcement of those laws. Our government, our leaders and many of the institutions are frankly missing in action. We do not need more nice-sounding laws with snappy names that will not be enforced to go collect dust on a shelf somewhere. We do not need another news release, another press conference or more platitudes from a government that certainly stopped caring about this long ago.

What we do need is our leaders to grow a spine and stand up to the communities that they swore an oath to protect. They need to actually do their jobs and stop the madness that is unfolding. They can start by coordinating the activities of our law enforcement agencies to prevent attacks, disrupt threats and prosecute offenders. They can make sure that the funding that they promise to these institutions actually flows without the red tape, and they can double that funding today. They can establish the foreign influence registry that they promised years ago. They can round up the terrorists that we know are living on our streets and send them home, such as the 700 identified IRGC terrorists, who dine in posh steakhouses and intimidate our communities. They can hunt down the people who commit these heinous crimes and put them in jail. They have the power to do all of those things right now, but they choose not to. Instead, they pretend the solution is a bill that nobody has asked for, and nearly every faith community agrees is harmful and counterproductive to its goals.

We cannot legislate ourselves out of a crisis. I am going to say on the floor what we, oftentimes, do not say enough: We do not need new laws. We need the enforcement of existing laws. We need action from politicians and we need a recognition in this country that this is actually a crisis.

Government Orders

• (1645)

We do not go out of our way to censor opponents by limiting the free speech of those we might disagree with. That is not how we fix things in this country. In fact, the Liberal government is censoring this very debate in Parliament on whether to enact a new censorship law. It would go after free expression instead of going after people who shoot up synagogues and Jewish schools, who burn down churches or who vandalize mosques, gurdwaras or temples. It would prosecute faith leaders from all stripes instead of prosecuting the very people perpetuating terrorism in our streets. It would chill the religious discourse instead of chilling the activities of the terrorists and foreign agents roaming free in this country with complete impunity.

Let me be very clear. It is already illegal to spew hate speech and foment violence against groups. That is not what Bill C-9 is about. Instead, it is about a government that chooses overreach every time it could choose leadership or action. It chooses ambiguity and infringement to hide from the very real consequences that its lack of action has brought on Canadians in their own cities. The Liberals will tell us that the Jewish community supports this. I will state clearly for everyone that this is one of the most divisive issues in that community, and worse, the Liberals did not even bother to ask clergy.

The rabbinical council of Toronto, the very people who represent the synagogues that were shot at this week, said that the contemplated changes to Bill C-9 threaten and would irreversibly erode the charter-protected rights of Canadians to worship freely and transmit the sacred teachings and principles that have guided and uplifted faith communities for thousands of years. These are the words of the senior rabbis in our own community, the ones who the Minister of Public Safety and other ministers stood at a podium with this weekend after their temples were shot at. They understand what is at stake and that the government left them on their own a long time ago. The government stood alongside them, could not be bothered to ask them what they thought about Bill C-9 and, instead, spewed into a microphone the bill as a way to stop events like what happened this weekend in Toronto.

The Liberals do not have the support of pastors, priests, imams, teachers or Canadians from faith backgrounds. They could have very well split the bill, and they chose not to. They chose to ram it through with something that was not introduced in the original version of the bill, and that is why we have a problem with it.

We are all on the same page with faith communities, and the only people who are not are those in the Liberal government who have succumbed to a demand from the Bloc on this issue to ram through debate on a bill that we all know is fundamentally flawed. We could have very well taken this out of the bill, had the debate on this specific issue and passed the protections for the communities, but the Liberals chose not to. At every turn, they choose not to act.

I will wrap up by saying that the day we dispose with sideshows like Bill C-9 is the day that we can finally get down to business and actually protect our communities. There are those who think they can control what happens on the other side of the world, which they cannot, but we absolutely have control of what we can do on our own soil. We can get the authorities working together. We can en-

force the law in this country. We can throw the terrorists out. We can introduce a foreign agent registry. We can do all of those things today instead of doing nothing.

I hope, for our community, that happens sooner rather than later, because I think the exhaustion is there. The days of watching ministers and the Prime Minister give condolences and thoughts and prayers over and over again are over, and there are better days ahead for a resilient community that I know deserves a whole lot better than the government they got.

• (1650)

Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite and I have a natural bond, being Jewish members of Parliament, and I enjoy the opportunity we often have to talk about the needs of the community and the country as a whole. I am not going to be partisan whatsoever.

One thing that my hon. colleague mentioned in her remarks was enforcement. I sometimes struggle to understand, even if I were to accept the argument in its entirety, which I do not, that the laws that currently exist are strong enough and it is an enforcement issue, I would like to understand from her perspective, aside from the IRGC, where I do understand where she is coming from, how, when we are talking about enforcement on the ground, let us say, at rallies, she believes the federal government has a role to play in discussions with police services.

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the government needs to recognize this as a national security threat. It needs to recognize this as domestic terror, and that is exactly where the government plays a role, with an integrated capacity from law enforcement. Starting with the RCMP, with partnerships with, in my own province, the OPP and local police, it should start enforcing the law.

I almost cannot find anyone in this country who believes that what is going on in the streets right now in communities right across the country is legal. The lack of enforcement, including the push that the federal government can make, and all levels of government, is astounding. The very fact that the member does not recognize that is very concerning.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in October 2024, during a religious speech, Adil Charkaoui called for the death of Jews in a prayer, citing religious reasons. The director of criminal and penal prosecutions was unable to move the case forward. He said that the reason was the religious exemption in the Criminal Code. What does my colleague think of that?

Government Orders

• (1655)

[English]

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, just to make it clear, and I am sure others have made it clear to the hon. member, the prosecution was very clear that that is not why it did not charge him, and this defence is not for calling for violence. That is already illegal, and this bill would change none of that.

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen that this motion brought forward by the Liberals on Bill C-9 effectively limits debate, forces the House to rush legislation and raises serious concerns for many faith communities. We know synagogues and other places of worship are being attacked across Canada. Laws already exist to punish hate and violence, yet the government is failing to enforce them. Instead, it is pushing Bill C-9 and removing religious protection.

Why is the government targeting religious freedom instead of protecting faith communities?

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the government's motion is not about protecting places of worship. It is about shutting down debate to force through something that was introduced late in the committee stage, not in the original bill. We very clearly offered to the Liberals to take this out and to debate the things that would actually protect religious institutions. Again, after two and a half years of screaming about this in the House, they chose not to. I hope everybody at home sees that when they can act, they choose not to act every single time.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in every community, there are people who are practising the faith to a greater or lesser extent, sometimes not at all. Obviously, that is the case with the Jewish community, as well as other communities. The member has noted that the rabbinical council of Toronto, which represents the Orthodox community, has expressed profound alarm about the removal of the religious defence.

We all want to see action on anti-Semitism, but why are they mixing that element in with this bill, creating division?

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, claiming that a community supports the bill without speaking to clergy is political and government malpractice. The Liberals need to listen to what clergy say right across the country, right through every community.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion we are going to vote on today is another example of the government's overreach and tyranny and of how it always wants to shut down debate, especially when it comes to freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

All day long, I have sat here and listened to the government members say, "We are the party of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms." The government is what its record says it is, and the government violated the mobility rights of millions of Canadians during the pandemic. It violated free expression under previous bills, like Bill C-11, Bill C-18 and Bill C-63, and now Bill C-9.

The emergency measures act that the Liberals put in place was illegal. They froze people's bank accounts, another violation, and authorized unlawful search and seizure. The Canadian summer jobs

attestation, where if someone did not agree with the Liberals and agree to sign off on their attestation, they could not get any funding. There were threats to the charitable status of faith organizations and pro-life organizations. All of these things show the Liberals' record is one of overreach and shutting down people's charter rights and freedoms. It is no wonder we are concerned that the Liberals want to shut down debate on the bill.

There was no need for them to align with the Bloc to remove the religious exemption from the hate speech law. It has been in place for 50 years. There was no controversy about it. It was not in the original text of the bill. There was no reason for them to align with the Bloc and cause this political hot potato.

Everybody recognizes that we have a problem with hate crimes in Canada. In the last few years, hate crimes have increased hugely. We see, in the Jewish community, synagogues being shot up, businesses being vandalized and "death to Jews" being called in the streets, with no enforcement of existing laws. We have seen over a hundred Christian churches torched and not a word from the government. We have seen mosques desecrated. We have seen Hindus intimidated and harassed.

We know there is a problem. There is no argument in the House that there is a problem with hate crimes in this country. The problem is not that we need Bill C-9. The problem is that we are not enforcing existing laws. It is already illegal to shoot up a synagogue. It is already illegal to vandalize a business. It is already illegal to utter death threats to people. There is no enforcement.

All day long, I have heard the government say, "Well, that's not our responsibility federally. That's provincial. There is nothing we can do about it." That is absolutely not true. The federal government, the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice have a responsibility to ensure that the rule of law in Canada is enforced. If the provinces and territories do not have the resources to do it, the government is perfectly able to add to it with the RCMP or with the military, to take the measures necessary to keep Canadians safe, but the Liberals have done nothing. There has been nothing but empty words, thoughts and prayers, and condolences. None of that does anything to help the communities that are under attack.

There is a misconception. The Liberals are saying we cannot have this religious exemption because then people would incite violence with their hate speech. No. In the law, there is currently no religious exemption for hate speech leading to and inciting violence. There is not one. The fact that that exists already in the Criminal Code should be enough.

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It is really concerning to me that the Liberals continue to argue that nobody is going to be imprisoned for quoting from scriptures. That is what they have been saying, but that is not what the current Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture said. He said people who quote certain scriptures from the Bible should be imprisoned. He did not walk that back. I talked to him about it, and he doubled down and agreed that was it.

He is not the only one. Multiple Liberal members serving in this Parliament have told me that they think I should be imprisoned for what I did as a youth leader in the Baptist church. Kids talked to me all the time. They wanted to know what the Bible said about sexuality. I told them. Multiple Liberals in this House have said I should have been imprisoned for that. Members will forgive me if I do not believe the Liberals when they say they are going to uphold our charter rights and freedoms and that I would not go to prison. I do not believe that for a moment.

● (1700)

The second thing is that often in this country, we see persecution and the use of the justice system to ultimately punish people. If someone were to be charged under this hate speech law because there was no religious exemption and they quoted a scripture that offended somebody, they would have to get a lawyer. They would have to go through years in the justice system, with appeal on appeal, until finally it would get to the Supreme Court, which would say, "You're right. This violated your charter rights. And it destroyed your life, and you're bankrupt." That would be totally unacceptable.

We know that the government is not going to protect the charter rights of Canadians, and we know it for a number of reasons. We know it because we already said we would take the Liberals at their word and bring forward an amendment. This is the amendment the Conservatives brought forward: "Nothing in this section is to be interpreted or applied so as to interfere with the freedom of expression or the freedom of religion." The Liberals voted against that because they do intend to violate people's expression rights and religious rights.

I am not just standing here talking about myself going to prison; certainly, I do not think I belong in prison. There are 30 million people of faith in this country. We have seen a whole list opposed to this religious exemption being removed: the Anglican Church of Canada, the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Muslim Healthcare Network, the United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel, the Christian Legal Fellowship, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Canadian Council of Imams, the rabbinical council of Toronto, the Hikma Public Affairs Council, the Seventh-day Adventist church, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, ARPA Canada and the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

I have no idea why 30 million people who are represented by faiths across the country say they do not trust the government and believe that what it is going to do is allow people to imprison folks who quote scriptures or express views that are offensive to people. We know that because Bill C-9 would dilute the definition of hate.

Why would the government change the definition to make it less? That is a question that bears speaking about.

People have fought in frozen trenches for years in war for the freedoms that are in our charter, and those people would be turning in their graves right now to see the government continually violating the charter rights that they gave their lives fighting for, continually eroding religious freedom and freedom of expression in the country and allowing the kinds of activities we are seeing in our country.

Ultimately, I think we are going to have to have more debate on this, and if we do not have it now, then it will be part of this justice system punishment on the first person who goes to prison, and I hope it is not me. A guy in B.C. was just charged \$750,000 for saying there are two genders. He has every right to express his opinion, and probably when it is appealed, after years and years, they will say that yes, absolutely, he does have that right, but the punishment and the financial penalties will chill free speech and freedom of religion in this country.

Finally, in summary, the Conservatives are willing to work across the aisle. We said we would split the bill and put forward the parts that we all agree on to try to get some extra protection and some extra tools for the police.

On this hill, I will absolutely be prepared to die to protect religious freedom and freedom of expression in Canada.

● (1705)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think I have ever quoted the Toronto Sun. This will be the first time. I would like to quote from an article that was published, by Joseph Neuberger, that was special to the Toronto Sun. He says, "I write as a criminal lawyer with more than 32 years of experience, and as the chair of the Canadian Jewish Law Association.... I also write as a supporter of political campaigns, including the Conservatives in the last election, and I want to be clear that the real danger is not that religious freedom will be curtailed."

The headline is "Bill C-9 doesn't threaten religious freedom. It draws a necessary line". I wonder if the member would be interested in reading the full article, which ultimately says that what the Conservatives are promoting is just wrong.

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, when the bill was originally published, I had only two concerns about the bill. The first was the dilution of the definition of hate speech. The second was the removal of the oversight of the Attorney General over hate speech cases. That was put in place to prevent frivolous lawsuits. Fortunately, the Conservatives brought an amendment to fix that one in the bill and restore the oversight of the Attorney General.

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It was not until this Bloc-Liberal amendment to remove the protections on religious freedoms was talked about that everything started to fall apart for the government. If it wants to see this move forward, it needs to split the bill so that we can move forward with what we agree will actually help people.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should bring the debate back to the substance of the bill.

The bill says that a person cannot promote hatred under the guise of religion. We have been debating this for far too long already. In committee, there has been systematic obstruction from the Conservatives that makes no sense.

From what I understand, my friends think that a person should be able to promote hatred if it is for religious reasons. That makes no sense.

My colleague said earlier that she would not trust politicians with her religious freedom and freedom of expression. Personally, I would have even less trust in priests and religious experts to tell us how we should behave in society and what does or does not promote hatred.

I think she needs to review or reread the bill.

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

The religions we have in Canada are religions of love, not religions of hate. We do not see, for example, the Christian church trying to hate on people. We do not see the Jewish church trying to hate on people. That is not at all what it means to have faith in this country. The freedom is to have that faith, even if other people find what one says offensive. Being offended is not a charter right, but freedom of religion and freedom of expression are.

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal committee members called no evidence whatsoever when witnesses were called to committee to study Bill C-9.

What evidentiary basis does my colleague think the government is relying on to support its justification for the removal of a 50-year-old defence?

Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who has worked so hard on this file, for that question.

I do not know how the government can deny that 30 million people of faith in this country have concerns about this when the Catholic diocese, the Anglican Church, the Evangelical Fellowship and the Muslim council wrote to the Prime Minister. Everyone wrote to the Prime Minister and expressed concern about that, and the government has turned a deaf ear to the situation, unfortunately. That is why we are here today. That is why we will continue to fight this removal of the religious exemption from the hate speech act.

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

It is a pleasure to be speaking in this chamber today on this very important piece of legislation. It is one of a trio of bills that we, on this side of the House, committed to and campaigned on when this was put in our platform, along with the other pieces of legislation around intimate partner violence and other crimes against women and children, and our bail and sentencing reforms. It added up, in my experience, to be the most ambitious set of criminal justice proposals that we have proposed on this side of the House in not just one generation but several generations.

The bill is coming from a place of real concern and need with respect to the growth in hate crimes in Canada. Statistics from Statistics Canada show that from 2022 to 2023, there was a 32% increase in the number of hate crimes. There were almost 5,000. There were 1,284 crimes targeting religion in 2023, which was a 67% increase. Nine hundred of them focused on Jewish people and 211 of them focused on Muslims. Hate crimes related to sexual orientation over that year, between 2022 and 2023, according to Statistics Canada, were up 69% to 860 such crimes.

We are in a situation supercharged by social media, supercharged by, I believe, some of the postpandemic effects on people and supercharged by, yes, things that are happening in the world that are motivating people to express themselves negatively. However, this is not just about negative expression. This is about hate crime. This is about crimes that are at the level of the Criminal Code.

There are a couple of provisions in this legislation that I think are really important in illustrating the myths versus what is actually in the legislation. For instance, I have been hearing from people in my riding of Taiaiko'n—Parkdale—High Park that this legislation would, in their view, potentially impede their right to peaceful protest. The right to peaceful protest is a clear charter right and something that everyone on all sides of the House agrees with, and it would not be subject to this legislation. What would be subject to it are intimidation and physical obstruction in the very targeted places and manners laid out in the legislation, where an identifiable group is gathered and it is a specific act of intimidation and physical obstruction, not peaceful protest. Peaceful protest would continue to be protected by this legislation.

On the other hand, I have heard on the other side of the House that a variety of forms of expression would be prohibited by this legislation. There is a very specific statement about hate speech in a recent Supreme Court decision, which we are merely bringing into legislation, around vilification and detestation. This is not about all those other forms of expression. This is very specifically about vilification and detestation.

We have added the incorporation of hate symbols from organizations that are on the list of terrorist organizations, which is a list of organizations that I believe is managed with great care. When an organization is added to that list, it is because, in the expert determination of those who follow it, that organization is a terrorist organization. We have good debates in the House about that. It is those symbols, displayed in those particular contexts, that then would rise to the level of this bill, whereby we would seek to criminalize the display of those symbols in those contexts.

The charter rights would continue to be protected in all respects, but the display of these hate symbols, unfortunately, is something we have seen more of and, I think, requires this level of extraordinary intervention. I have just cited some of the statistics about the rise in hate crimes. We know that synagogues in the greater Toronto area in particular are being targeted.

In recent weeks, I have had the chance to visit or be in conversation with leaders from the Jami mosque in Taiaiako'n—Parkdale—High Park, Toronto's oldest mosque, along with the Albanian mosque on Annette Street and the Hamza mosque in Parkdale. I have also visited with and been in touch with the leadership of the Junction Shul on Maria Street, which I know has a special connection to the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I have been in conversation with faith leaders.

• (1715)

I have not heard from them the kind of rhetoric that I hear from the other side. I do not hear any fear from them about their ability or opportunities to participate in the kinds of religious service and in the kinds of free speech that they continue to enjoy. It is important to be aware of the myths that are being propagated versus the very targeted interventions that we are doing here in response to a very evident rise in hate crime.

I wish we did not need this legislation, but it is an extraordinary set of events that are coming together, witnessed as recently as this weekend in the greater Toronto area, where we need to assert, not just as a legislature and not just as lawmakers, but as a House collectively, that we stand against this kind of vilification and detestation and that, yes, reasonable, targeted amendments to the Criminal Code are necessary to do so.

We have a programming motion that we are debating right now. The bill has seen over 30 hours of debate and over 30 witnesses at committee. It is time to pass the bill, to do our job as legislators, to be in receipt of the work of the committee and to bring the bill forward. It is a targeted piece of legislation that responds to the real needs and real concerns of our community, especially those who are vulnerable to vilification, hatred and detestation. We know who some of those groups are. They are asking us to act. My constituents are saying that we need more protection from hate, and we need to protect our right to free expression. The bill would do that.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, respectfully, it is quite extraordinary to hear the member say, with respect to the Muslim community, “I have talked to some people at the mosques in my riding, and everybody seems fine with it,” which was effectively what he said. We received a letter from over 350 different Muslim organizations in this country, expressing grave concern in line with the Canadian Con-

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ference of Catholic Bishops, with Protestant organizations and with the Rabbinical Council of Toronto, all raising concern about the removal of the religious defence.

I am not sure what the disconnect here is, but we see a lot of misrepresentation of stakeholder perspectives from the government's perspective. Why are the Liberals removing the religious defence? Why do they choose to do that?

• (1720)

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in my capacity here as an MP representing my constituents. The leaders I have been dealing with in my riding have not raised this as a concern that they feel needs an urgent response. The urgent response that they are raising is the fear and the potential fear that they know is being faced by them and their members and congregants. This piece of legislation, in a very targeted way, would do the job to respond.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, I myself took a telephone call at my office here on the Hill from a person who was calling to say that I should vote against Bill C-9. At the end of the conversation, the person said that they hoped that I would find it in my heart to change my mind. I replied that I hoped that they would use their intellect to read the bill, because they had been infected with Conservative misinformation. They had never read the bill in any form.

According to the misinformation that is being spread by the Conservatives, no witnesses came to talk about the religious exemption. I watched meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights again, and the member for Rivière-du-Nord asked each witness questions about the religious exemption. Some were for it and some were against it. There were opinions on both sides. That is what Parliament is for. That is how it should work.

Here is the question I want to ask my colleague. Why does he think the Conservatives are continuing to spread disinformation? Does he think they might be using this as a way to obtain election financing?

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, of course, I have received emails and correspondence. I have had, and continue to have, conversations with people who oppose this bill.

As my colleague said, these people have not had the opportunity to read the bill for themselves, and they have received misinformation and disinformation. They send me emails about things that are not in the bill.

When I calmly explain what the bill does and does not do, they are reassured.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we look at Bill C-9, it is important to recognize that there is nothing within the bill that actually threatens freedom of religion. In fact, the Charter of Rights guarantees it. It was a Liberal government, back in the 1970s, that brought in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What is happening today in our mosques, gurdwaras, churches and temples is going to continue to happen. There is no change.

My question for the member is this: What does the member believe, from his personal perspective, about individuals or groups that would promote misinformation on this particular important piece of legislation?

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question, and I realize this is also a fuller response to my colleague, the member for Mirabel.

I believe the source of this is an attempt to find opportunity. We have some good collaboration on some aspects of some pieces of legislation with the other side. We have had good conversation in the past about Bill C-5. We have had conversations about Bill C-19, the Canada groceries and essentials benefit act.

However, the other side needs to find that thing to provide a wedge, to say, "We are with you, and they are against you. They are not with you." I believe and I am concerned that the party on the other side is saying, "The Liberal Party of Canada is against you as a religious person. It is against religious organizations and religious freedom." I just stand firmly opposed on that. We are the party of the charter, and the charter is our guiding light.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the debate today on Bill C-9, I have to call out the profound dishonesty of so much of the argumentation that we have heard from the government. We see many of their speeches relying on personal attacks, ignoring the substance of the legislation, not engaging with what is actually in the bill, and trying to make it all about claims about their motivations and false imputations of motives on the other side.

Let us talk about the actual substance of the provisions. Bill C-9 includes a variety of provisions, but most controversially, it includes the removal of the religious defence, which means that a person could be prosecuted for a good-faith reading of a religious text or making a religious argument. I think what has alarmed so many people is not just those provisions, but those provisions in combination with the words of the Minister of Heritage at committee. When he served as chair of the justice committee, he spoke explicitly about how reading certain passages of the Bible would necessarily be seen as hateful and could not be interpreted as being in good faith. Those were the words of the then chair of the justice committee, who was promptly promoted by the Prime Minister to, imagine that, being our Minister of Heritage.

There is, as a result of these provisions and the comments of that minister, profound concern that what the Minister of Heritage talked about would actually come to pass, namely that people would be prosecuted for hate speech simply for reading scripture. As a result of that, there has been profound concern expressed by

members of all faith communities in this country. Leaders of the Orthodox Jewish community, over 350 Muslim organizations that put out a letter today, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and other Christian organizations across the denominational spectrum have all expressed profound concerns.

The Liberals are trying to claim that all of these different faith groups have been captured by the Conservative Party information machine. What nonsense. These religious organizations can speak for themselves. They can lead based on the concerns they have and the concerns of their own community. If the Conservative Party could actually control the opinions of all religious organizations at once in this country, I think it is fair to say that we would have won a few more elections. Let us dispense with this nonsense and let us show more respect for faith communities in this country to actually listen to what they are saying.

Liberals tell us, "Don't worry, because removing the religious defence doesn't really have any effect. Don't worry; it's not going to have the effect you say it has." If that is true, then why are they doing it? We hear Liberals make false claims about what removing the religious defence would not do, but we never hear them say what it would actually do. Let us cut through this nonsense and say that if they supported an amendment to remove the religious defence, they must have had some reason for doing that. It was not just a matter of insubstantial legislative housekeeping. They made a choice to remove this long-standing religious defence. They must have had a reason for doing it. Many faith communities are concerned, and we are concerned, that the reason they decided to do it is the same reason that was said out loud by the Minister of Heritage at committee, namely, their view that the reading of certain passages of scripture would or could or should be deemed hate speech. We are opposed to that.

The member who just spoke said that some people are trying to create the impression that Liberals do not respect conscience or religious freedom. My goodness, how could anyone have come to that conclusion? Well, in the last 10 years, they shut down the Office of Religious Freedom. They imposed a values test in association with the Canada summer jobs program. Also, the last report from the Liberal-dominated finance committee on budget consultations called for the removal of charitable status from houses of worship. The Liberal-dominated finance committee called for the stripping of charitable status from religious organizations. Now, members across the way are shocked that many religious people in this country are a little suspicious of the agenda of the Liberal Party of Canada.

● (1725)

When all of these things have happened over the last 10 years, and when the Minister of Heritage gets up and says that people should be prosecuted for reading religious scripture, members across the way are surprised: How come people are suspicious? This is not a conspiracy. Religious people are concerned because they have read the text of the bill, unlike many members opposite, and they are worried about it.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1730)

[*English*]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake, CPC) moved that Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (maximum security offenders), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this chamber to debate this important legislation that would help restore Canadians' trust and confidence in our criminal justice system and in federal institutions like Correctional Service Canada.

Bill C-232, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, is being debated today because I was inspired to bring this legislation forward after being approached by the loved ones of victims who were shocked and appalled to receive a phone call from CSC on May 29, 2023, about the transfer of serial killer and rapist Paul Bernardo from a maximum-security prison at Millhaven Institution in Ontario to a medium-security prison at La Macaza in Quebec.

This terrible decision by CSC Commissioner Anne Kelly not only shocked the country but appalled and revictimized the victims' families, friends and the communities I represent in Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Bill C-232 is about doing what is right. It is about addressing and resolving a serious flaw in our criminal justice and corrections system that permits criminal monsters like Paul Bernardo, Dellen Millard, Mark Smich and Luka Magnotta, among others, to benefit and be allowed to transfer from a maximum-security institution to medium security.

This bill proposes to require that all court-ordered dangerous offenders and mass murderers be permanently assigned a maximum-security classification and confined in a maximum-security penitentiary or area in a penitentiary. It would also repeal the Liberals' least restrictive environment standard for assigning inmates to prison. This standard was adopted in 2018 under the Justin Trudeau government in Bill C-83.

In addition to repealing this weak policy, it would strengthen and restore the language of “only the necessary restrictions” that the previous Conservative government put in place when it passed the Safe Streets and Communities Act in 2012. In fact, that legislation, known as Bill C-10, was spearheaded by my predecessor, the Hon. Rob Nicholson, who proudly represented Niagara Falls for 24 years prior to his deserved retirement in 2019. Mr. Nicholson was the minister of justice and attorney general of Canada at the time.

Paul Bernardo is serving a life sentence as a dangerous offender for the horrific abduction, sexual assaults and murders of Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy. Bernardo was convicted in 1995 and sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole for 25 years for stealing and ending the lives of two teenage girls who had their whole bright futures ahead of them. When he committed these atrocities, he also ruined the lives of their loved ones and sentenced them to a lifetime of inescapable pain, trauma and suffering.

Private Members' Business

So far, Bernardo has applied for parole three times, in 2018, 2021 and 2024. He has rightfully been denied each time. In his most recent parole hearing in November of 2024, Bernardo sought day parole at a halfway house or, at a minimum, escorted absences from prison so that he could attend a community program for sex offenders. He was denied both.

According to a CBC article, Tanya Nouwens, one of the members of a two-member parole panel, told Bernardo, “Although you have made progress, we are still placing a lot of weight on the clinical assessments, a lot of weight on the seriousness of your criminal behaviour. And for that reason, the board has determined today your risk would be undue”. While it was the right outcome, this quote is still concerning because it raises the question of progress.

I have to ask: Progress toward what end? Paul Bernardo is the worst of the worst. Let me be frank. He should never be granted parole, but after 10 years under the Liberal government's watch, Canada's justice and corrections system has been eroded and lost its balance. It has become far more one-sided and empathetic toward the offender and the consideration of the offender's care than the impacts on victims and victims' families and how law-abiding Canadians see, perceive and make sense of that system.

● (1735)

In fact, in a CBC article from June 2023, Benjamin Roebuck, the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime, said the corrections system strikes the wrong balance between victims' rights and prisoners' privacy rights. In a quote from that article, he says, “The entire system is imbalanced...the victims are the ones who are most directly affected, who continue to suffer from the consequences”.

Mr. Roebuck further reinforced this view when he testified at the public safety committee in November 2023, in a study on the rights of victims of crime, reclassification and transfer of federal offenders. Mr. Roebuck informed committee members that:

We need supporting legislation and comparable resources....

We know that victims are not put first, and I'm not sure that people understand the importance of information to victims of crime.

The fact that these terrible criminals are judged to be progressing through Canada's corrections system while the voices of victims of crime are somehow sidelined and, in a way, silenced is concerning and should be shocking to us all.

Private Members' Business

This is a non-partisan issue. It is about doing what is right. Keeping dangerous offenders, serial killers and mass murderers like Paul Bernardo, Dellen Millard, Mark Smich and Luka Magnotta in a maximum-security prison is common sense. Simply put, there should have been no way that any of these criminals were ever downgraded and transferred from a maximum-security prison to a medium-security prison, yet on May 29, 2023, this is exactly what happened to Paul Bernardo.

The CSC decision to transfer Bernardo to a medium-security prison was met with immediate and harsh public outrage on a national scale. Locally, both the cities of St. Catharines and Thorold passed municipal resolutions requesting that Correctional Service Canada and the Liberal government act. In the motion adopted by the City of St. Catharines, it states:

...City Council request[s] that the Government of Canada review and consider legislation changes to ensure transparency in the corrections and parole system and examine the guidelines around moving dangerous offenders and sadistic psychopaths who have not exhibited any remorse, empathy or insight into their crimes into medium security prisons....

The mayor of Thorold also wrote and expressed this:

The gravity of Mr. Bernardo's crimes, and the devastating impact they had on the lives of innocent individuals and their families, cannot be understated. Our community, along with the wider Niagara region, continues to bear the scars left by these reprehensible actions. It is of utmost importance that we prioritize public safety and ensure that those who pose a significant risk to society are appropriately confined and monitored.

I could not agree more. Decades since these heinous crimes were committed, the nightmares and scars from the terror still linger in the communities they impacted in St. Catharines, as well as in the Niagara communities that I represent in Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The Liberal government must answer these questions. Why are these prison transfers happening? Why are they benefiting Canada's most evil criminals and to what end? Is it the desire of the Liberal government to continue the progression of these dangerous offenders, serial killers and mass murderers until they are transferred to minimum-security prison or until they are granted parole or lesser conditions?

Surely the Liberal government does not believe that the likes of Paul Bernardo, Dellen Millard, Mark Smich and Luka Magnotta should continue to be downgraded until they are out of the corrections system, or does it?

The Canadian justice and corrections system must be rebalanced to support law-abiding Canadians and victims of crime. That needs to be the goal, and Bill C-232 will help restore this balance, as well as the confidence of Canadians in their federal institutions. These CSC decisions to transfer dangerous offenders and mass murderers from maximum-security prison to medium-security prison undermines public confidence, erodes public trust and raises serious questions and debate about who the justice system serves and prioritizes: the victims, as it should, or the criminal.

Canadians know something is wrong when even CSC Commissioner Anne Kelly, the person responsible for these transfers, conceded this about Bernardo. She said, "The fact that he is at a medium-security institution does not negate the fact that he is a psychopath, and that he committed horrific and unspeakable crimes".

• (1740)

There is also the former public safety minister's own reaction to the news about Bernardo's transfer. He was quoted by CBC as saying, "as a former federal prosecutor and as a Canadian...I was profoundly concerned and again shocked by this decision". This was a quote from the former minister who was in charge. It does not come as a surprise then that shortly after this national debacle, Minister Mendicino was dropped by Justin Trudeau from cabinet.

Canadians are in disbelief about this whole thing. These comments are from the people who hold authority. They are the ones Canadians expect to run and competently manage Canada's corrections system and institutions like CSC to ensure and uphold public safety. Despite their own acknowledgements of how bad Paul Bernardo is, they carried on and moved forward as if nothing had happened and continue to allow these types of transfers to occur.

The new Liberal Minister of Public Safety has failed to take any action, and the same CSC commissioner has failed to reverse her decisions. Last week, the government announced she is leaving her role and will be replaced. Canadians will be watching closely to see what actions the new commissioner takes, or fails to take, in their new role.

The person who first contacted me and asked that I get involved to help on this issue was a close friend of one of Paul Bernardo's victims. Her name is Marcia Penner. In a letter she wrote to CSC Commissioner Anne Kelly, and I think she speaks for all Canadians, she stated:

Please help me understand how someone such as Paul Bernardo can be housed in a facility such as this. One of Canada's most notorious killers. A psychopathic serial rapist. A designated DANGEROUS OFFENDER. Does any of this mean anything? I can only imagine the prisoners remaining in maximum security penitentiaries must be asking the same question. If someone who commits the worst of the worst crimes doesn't qualify for the harshest conditions, then who does?

Marcia is right, and Bill C-232 is the solution to fix this major problem and do what is ultimately right. Bill C-232 also complements a larger Conservative effort, through several private members' bills, to combat the out-of-control crime wave Canadians are facing after a decade of bad Liberal policies that weakened our federal institutions like the CSC.

Private Members' Business

The Liberal government now talks about implementing needed justice reforms. Sadly, these reforms are required to fix the problems the Liberals created when they weakened provisions of previous Conservative legislation through bills such as Bill C-5, Bill C-75 and Bill C-83. There is hope. Two of my colleagues' bills, Bill C-243 and Bill C-242, resume their second reading debates soon. I am encouraged to see that both Bill C-225 and Bill C-221 have passed second reading and have been referred to committee for further study and consideration by parliamentarians. I am hopeful that Bill C-232 will follow suit and receive the widespread support of my hon. colleagues to reach committee as well.

Enough is enough. It is time we start rebalancing the corrections system to weigh victims' considerations more strongly, restore Canadians' trust and confidence in our federal institutions and return dangerous offenders and mass murderers like Paul Bernardo, Dellen Millard, Mark Smich and Luka Magnotta to maximum-security prisons where they rightly belong. With the support of colleagues in the House, we can make this happen. We can respond to the calls from our constituents, communities and, more importantly, the families of those victims of crime.

I stand in my place today because I made a promise to see what I could do to help correct a horribly wrong decision made by the government. I ask my colleagues to support this effort. Working together, we can accomplish great things and do so in memory of those so tragically lost.

• (1745)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was not that long ago that we had a Conservative member bring forward Bill C-351, which is, in essence, the same as Bill C-232. At that time, there was a debate and ultimately a vote. We saw members of the Liberal Party, the Bloc Party, the New Democratic Party and, I believe, even the member from the Green Party vote against the legislation.

Can the member give a clear indication as to what the actual difference is between the two pieces of legislation? Has he received support from any of those political entities with respect to this current version?

Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, I stand in this place because I am responding to the concerns that were expressed to me by the families and friends of the victims in my community. They asked that we take steps to fix the flawed legislation from Bill C-83; to make the changes found in my legislation, Bill C-232; and to restore wording of the previous legislation, which the government removed and added the wording “least restrictive environment” when it comes to prison selection.

We are going to go back to the previous wording that worked in the Conservative legislation: “only the necessary restrictions”. That change needs to be made. We also need to designate dangerous offenders and murderers who murder multiple people as receiving a maximum-security classification and designation.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague who is affected and who is using his privilege to introduce a

bill that affects him and his constituents. However, when a member introduces a bill, it cannot be tailored to one specific case. It has to be designed with society as a whole in mind, and it must apply to a broad group.

Unless I missed something, I did not hear my colleague mention the possibility of miscarriages of justice, for example. We know that mistakes are made. We know that there are people who have been convicted of murder and who have served their sentences only to later be acquitted. This happened to one inmate in Quebec after 18 years.

Is my colleague's bill too restrictive? Would applying it to all cases, in a more broad and general way, cause problems for the justice system?

[English]

Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, there are two provisions. The bill is about changing the wording with regard to “least restrictive environment” and going back to the previous Conservative wording. It also would designate people who are dangerous offenders and those who commit multiple murders as having a maximum-security classification so they serve their time in maximum security rather than medium security. It is about designating the worst of the worst, the people who have committed the most heinous of crimes, and ensuring that they serve their sentence in a maximum-security institution, where they belong.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola on an issue about which I am very passionate. One of the reasons is that I actually worked in the federal correctional system, which is completely germane to the bill.

I want to respond to something the member for Winnipeg North said. In all candour, I have not heard a single Liberal speak today apart from the member, and I have been in the House throughout the day. There are other Liberals here, six or seven of them in the House right now, yet we cannot—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The member knows he cannot note the absence or presence of members in the House. I am going to ask him to very quickly get to the point of his question so I can give the member time to respond.

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, with respect, I did not say who was or was not here.

At the end of the day, here is the problem: The member is talking about who on the Liberal side did not vote for this. As Conservatives, we take our instructions from the people who sent us here. The Liberals can say all they want about not supporting this and that it is never going to pass. Why should we be taking our instructions from the member for Winnipeg North and not the people of Canada—

Private Members' Business

• (1750)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake has time for a brief response.

Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, I said this earlier in my remarks: I stand in my place today putting forward this legislation because I made a promise to my constituents to listen and respond to their concerns and to take action to ensure that monsters like Paul Bernardo serve their sentence in a maximum-security institution, where they rightly belong.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite is very pleased I have taken the opportunity to rise to address this piece of legislation, even though with his presence in the chamber one has to question his level of alertness. If he were actually following the debate today, he would know that numerous Liberal members of Parliament stood up not only to address the issues of the day but also to ask questions.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if the member maybe just paid a bit more attention, for example, right now as he is heckling across the way, he would probably have a better understanding of what actually is taking place inside the House.

Let me make a suggestion. I believe the member was making reference to taking instructions from the people who sent us here. We will find that this is in fact something all members, I would like to think, do, whether they are a Liberal, a Conservative, a New Democrat, or whatever political entity one might be from.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member who continues to want to heckle me that the people I represent in Winnipeg North understand how important it is to respect the issue of judicial independence. Judicial independence is a shared responsibility between different levels of government, and I would suggest that even when we deal with incarceration and with Correctional Service Canada, which makes the determinations, I believe Canadians fully understand and respect that.

I see that the member is having a very difficult time appreciating what I am saying. I will get a bit more into it for the member opposite, so he should stay tuned and be alert, and he might actually learn something here.

Let me first express what is a very difficult thing to do: to recognize the pain that has been experienced by family and friends of victims, who have had to go through trials of all different forms as a direct result of a horrendous crime that has been committed. One can only imagine how a parent of a child who has been raped, molested and then murdered is affected. We could factor in a serial killer. It affects not only the family; it also affects the community, and I would suggest it affects the country.

People can understand just how horrendous it is. Sadly, in society, whether it is Canada or virtually any other nation, these crime take place. I for one cannot believe, or I find it very hard to under-

stand, unless one has lived that experience first-hand, just how difficult it is, especially for a parent. I do not think one can ever recover from an incident of losing a child, whatever the age of that child might be, because of the type of horrendous crimes we are talking about.

It was a number of years ago that the Conservatives raised during question period the whole McClintic ordeal, another horrific incident that had taken place in Canada. It actually dealt with the same type of issue. All we need to do is check Hansard, and we will read about Conservative after Conservative standing in his or her place, talking about it in a very graphic way, in great detail. I tended to disagree with that, and I would hope that if someone does the research and looks back, they would find that I was consistent with my comments.

• (1755)

It continued day after day until Ralph Goodale took the floor and pointed out a very important observation. I would like to quote Ralph Goodale in a speech that he gave here in the House. This is important because it goes back to 2014. The government of the day was under Stephen Harper, with whom the current leader of the Conservative Party sat around the cabinet table. Ralph Goodale stood up on October 2, 2018, and said:

Mr. Speaker, Tori Stafford's brutal death in 2009 was a horrible, gut-wrenching crime for her family, but for the whole country too.

The killer, McClintic, was reclassified as medium security in 2014. The government of that day did not challenge that decision. In fact, McClintic remains in a medium-security correctional facility today.

I want people to realize that a member of the Conservative Party, and the Conservative Party itself, attempted to bring forward the legislation, in essence, previously. It was voted against by all political entities except for the Conservative Party, which included the Bloc, the New Democrats, the Greens and the Liberals. The Conservatives are reintroducing, in essence, the same legislation.

I point out what Ralph Goodale said, because back then, when today's leader of the Conservative Party had an opportunity and he sat around the cabinet table, why did the Conservatives not contest the decision in that situation? I think it is a valid question to be asking.

At the end of the day, Hansard is there. The Conservatives can read it. I do not think we do a service to the chamber by continuing to build up some sort of an expectation that if they were in government, they would implement the legislation, when the leader of the Conservative Party sat around the cabinet table and did not do so. If we take a look at the decision, we see that Correctional Service Canada makes the decisions to transfer and reclassify, as it did in 2014, when the leader of the Conservative Party said nothing. As a result—

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member is not permitted to mislead the House. There was Bill C-28, which changed things. He is leaving that out. He is misleading the House. He should—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I know where the member thinks he has a point of order, but that is a question of debate. I know the member has a speaking slot later where he can certainly raise those matters for debate, but it is not a point of order.

Private Members' Business

The hon. member can resume.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the interruption is unfortunate, but I am not surprised.

I was making the point that at the end of the day, we do have Correctional Service Canada that ultimately is in the best position to make a decision that is not based on politics. Back in the day, when it did happen when the member's party leader sat around the cabinet table—

• (1800)

Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I question the relevance of this little filibuster and would like to get back to the subject of the hate bill, Bill C-9.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member is rising on the same point of order, and I hope he will keep it very brief. I think we can move on quickly.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, to show that it was relevant, so the member is aware, it is about transferring from maximum security to minimum—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): We are going to say that this is a matter of debate, and we will have lots of time to debate this going forward.

The member has about one minute left. I would ask him to conclude his remarks in one minute or less.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, from her seat, the member says I am not debating Bill C-9. We are not talking about Bill C-9. We are talking about a private member's bill. It is completely relevant. It is hypocrisy when we have the leader of the Conservative Party and the Conservative Party today talking about politicization, whereas when he was in government around the cabinet table, he did nothing of the sort in regard to a transfer.

At the end of the day, I think that the constituents we represent understand and appreciate the fact that it is important to recognize the independence of our entire judicial system. They have a system that is in place to protect Canadians, and we need to respect that.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to take part in the study of this bill. This is a rather delicate matter, since this bill was introduced to respond to a very specific case. I think it is dangerous to draft a bill that targets a single case. As legislators, we have to think about how our bill will apply to all sorts of criminals who are incarcerated if it is passed, and we need to consider its actual application.

Yesterday, I read in the newspapers that another fight had gone awry at the federal penitentiary in Donnacona and that one inmate had killed another. I can say that the situation in federal penitentiaries is no bed of roses for correctional officers right now, because they are so short-staffed. There is a shortage of correctional officers. Correctional officers are really stretched to the limit because of equipment and recruitment issues. They are sometimes five or six officers short on certain shifts. That is the case at the Drummondville federal penitentiary, for example. Those are difficult conditions.

The bill refers to the irrevocable incarceration of any inmate who has committed more than one murder. The bill does not refer only to dangerous offenders. It refers to criminals who have committed more than one murder or who have been found to be dangerous offenders. It states that these individuals would be required to serve their sentences in a maximum-security penitentiary with no possibility of release. That is what we find problematic about this bill. It bears repeating that the Bloc Québécois believes in the justice system and the work done by Correctional Service Canada. Above all, the Bloc believes in rehabilitation. Basically, we oppose sentences that could hinder rehabilitation.

Before our Conservative colleagues get all worked up, I want to say that we know that some criminals have no capacity for rehabilitation. For example, in the case at issue here, that of Paul Bernardo, we know that this offender is not capable of being rehabilitated. We understand that, and we know that this bill is really aimed at him. Paul Bernardo is a name that everyone knows because, in the early 1990s, he and his accomplice kidnapped, tortured, raped and killed three young girls. He was sentenced to life in prison for those horrific crimes. He is a dangerous offender.

The reason we are talking about him with respect to this bill is because he got himself transferred, in strict secrecy and without the families' knowledge, to a series of medium-security prisons, including La Macaza, which is in my colleague's riding. Many mistakes were made on that file, and it cost the then minister of public safety his job. Members may know that La Macaza houses a number of sex offenders. This transfer was carried out in strict secrecy, as I was saying, probably because Correctional Service Canada believed that the public would never tolerate the idea of this dangerous offender being transferred to a medium-security prison.

It goes without saying, but I want to make it very clear that we have no pity for criminals like Paul Bernardo, Luka Rocco Magnotta or Alexandre Bissonnette. The bill, as it is currently written, is primarily aimed at them, but it also covers people who have committed multiple murders, more than one murder. It is this aspect that we have an issue with. I just want to remind members that three factors are taken into account when determining where an inmate will be detained. One of the primary reasons an inmate may be incarcerated in a maximum-security prison is their behaviour.

• (1805)

For example, an inmate who constantly assaults their fellow inmates or correctional officers could be transferred to a maximum-security prison to ensure the safety of others. Another factor is flight risk. We have seen dangerous offenders who have managed to escape from prison. Those who attempt or manage to escape may require closer supervision and will therefore be placed in a maximum-security prison. Those who pose a high risk to public safety will also be placed in a maximum-security prison.

Private Members' Business

We can all agree that, in Paul Bernardo's case, Correctional Service Canada's judgment was questionable. One has to wonder how it came to the decision that it did. It made no sense at all to parliamentarians and especially to victims, their families and the community. Again, that decision was so reckless that it cost the justice minister at the time his job.

Let us keep in mind that Bill C-232 amends the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to require that inmates who have been found to be dangerous offenders or convicted of more than one first degree murder be assigned a security classification of maximum and confined in a maximum security penitentiary or area in a penitentiary.

In our view, this provision cannot be broadly applied because we know the justice system makes mistakes. Sometimes justice gets it wrong. It is sad but true. Many examples come to mind. In my questions earlier, I talked about Claude Paquin, who was convicted of two first-degree murders and spent 18 years in prison. He was acquitted at the age of 81, 41 years after he was charged. The first thing he said to the judge when she finally exonerated him was, "You just got me out of hell."

It is clear that if my colleague's bill were passed, Mr. Paquin could never have been found innocent and acquitted in the end, even after 18 years in prison. That is why we oppose the bill before us. However, I understand where my colleague is coming from, because this request came from his community and his constituents. That is often what moves us emotionally, leading us to introduce bills that our constituents are calling for. I understand that he firmly believes that his bill will fix the situation and that there will be no more cases like Paul Bernardo's.

I can say one thing. I am touring federal penitentiaries in Quebec. I have visited Port-Cartier and Drummond. I am going to visit La Macaza and the women's prison in Joliette soon. During my first two visits, I was truly shocked to see how little support Correctional Service Canada provides to correctional officers.

I am struck by the fact that these officers have to work and do mandatory overtime in working conditions that anyone would find unacceptable. I am being sincere when I say that those working in a maximum security prison have to be tough, because it is dangerous. It is dangerous work, and not just because the inmates are dangerous, but also because the work tools are faulty. Some of these prisons could really use some TLC, and they need to adapt to new technologies.

Is it normal for drones to openly smuggle drugs and weapons into the Drummondville and Port-Cartier prisons, or for correctional officers to work in second-hand marijuana smoke because drugs are being brought into our prisons via drones?

There is much to be said about the working conditions of our officers and the current situation in our prisons. The Conservatives have been pushing to put more people in prison since the start of this parliamentary session. That is perfectly normal for some. Nevertheless, I will conclude by saying that while that is all well and good, we must also ensure that correctional officers in prisons are able to do their jobs properly. We must ensure their safety and that of the public.

• (1810)

[English]

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, but this is a particularly good occasion.

Before I begin, I want to recognize the work of Anita Price, somebody who faithfully and diligently worked in my office at 100 Mile House, which is no longer in the riding, as well as in our Kamloops office on an as-needed, part-time basis. Anita has just been a stalwart. We thank her for her service to the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola and all Canadians.

I also want to welcome to Canada Hunter Rose Friesen, the daughter of Mike Friesen and Brittany Matheson. Mike was a former staff member here on Parliament Hill, who also served a number of Canadians and a number of members of Parliament. We welcome Hunter, and we hope she and her parents are doing well.

On a more sombre note, I recognize the life of Giovannina McCurry, wife of Vittorio and mother to Amadeilla, Mirella, Rita, Giovanni and Pietro. She passed away, leaving behind many memories of a family who I am sure misses her deeply. I have for some time been hoping for the opportunity to stand to recognize a life well lived. May perpetual light shine upon her.

I also rise today and recognize the life of Alfredo Caputo. Of course, sharing the same last name, we are related. He was pre-deceased by his wife, Fiorina, and his daughter, Luigina. Left to mourn him are Peter, Anna, Rosie and their families. He leaves behind many grandchildren. I was able to just make his funeral last week. He will obviously be missed. As a treasured part of the Caputo family, I wish his family all the best in a difficult time of mourning. May perpetual light shine upon him.

I rise today as well to recognize the life of Dina Piva. I have gotten to know a couple of her sons quite well, especially her son Dennis. I also know Laura and Mario, the other children Dina leaves behind. Her family has done so much for the area, for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola. They are a well-respected family. I know that her children will present her legacy in an amazing way. May perpetual light shine upon her.

There are so many people on the Liberal benches who I wish could hear this speech. We were misled today by the member for Winnipeg North. In fact, if he disagrees with me, I wish he would rise in his spot right now and call a point of order stating that he did not mislead anybody. He did not state the facts. This is why.

Private Members' Business

He asked why, when the Leader of the Opposition was in cabinet, he did not deal with Paul Bernardo being transferred to medium security, which is what we are talking about in this private member's bill. It was because the law was different. The Liberals changed the law. With Bill C-28, in the 42nd Parliament, they changed the threshold for correctional custody for all decision-making to what is called the least restrictive measure. That means a person must be incarcerated under the least restrictive measure. That means that if they can be handled in minimum security, they must go there, regardless of how heinous their offence is. The member told the House and Canadians that the Conservatives could have dealt with it and did not. That is completely wrong and, dare I say, very misleading. He was told it was misleading, and he doubled down. That is not what we should expect and accept as members of this House.

● (1815)

I actually visited the jail where Paul Bernardo was held, and Anne Kelly, the commissioner of corrections, on her way out, in my view, did not like what I had to say, because under her watch, the government put out information that was false about my visit, but I was there with a staff member and a union member who backed up everything I had to say.

I went to Paul Bernardo's cell. He walked up, and we came eye to eye. What did the government say? It was that the MP and Bernardo had no interactions. Well, of course we had no interactions. I did not want to talk to the guy. I did not want to shake his hand. He is one of the most vile people in Canada. No, we did not have any interactions, but we actually did come eye to eye. People can look this up on local media in Kamloops, because the correctional union official gave a statement to the media. The fact that Anne Kelly and correctional officials would seek to sully the reputation of a member of Parliament is disgusting, and it is wrong.

It is the same thing with the hockey rink. Paul Bernardo has a hockey rink there. There were nets that were tilted up so they would not freeze against the rink. The government said that the hockey rink was not currently operational. What does that mean? One thing officials did not say was that the tennis court was not currently operational. For those who are not aware, the hockey rink doubles as a tennis court. I have a photo of it, if anybody wants to see. It has lighting of the kind that we would find at a local park.

When the Liberals say, "What's the big deal?", I will tell them what the big deal is. Paul Bernardo, in medium security, has access to a hockey rink, tennis court and skates, which the government left out in its defamatory statements. I would challenge any of those members to say it outside of here. They would not say that I am lying. They just like to put 40% of the picture together, which is meant to mislead.

What does it say about us as a society when one of Canada's worst people can go from maximum to medium security? If members do not think that there is a difference, and I believe Anne Kelly told one of the victims there was no difference, there is actually a substantial difference. The perimeter security is the same, two fences, but as somebody who worked in corrections, I can say that if a person goes to maximum security, there is door after door. In medium security, it is often an open concept.

Terri-Lynne McClintic, and this is something that I hope the member from Winnipeg digests, killed an eight-old girl, Tori Stafford. Part of it was a sexual assault. Guess where she is: medium security. She lives in townhouse-style living, and guess what is next to her house in medium security? It is the mother-child program. We cannot make this up. A sex offender who killed a child lives next door to the mother-child program, but the Liberals will tell us, "Don't worry, the door is locked all the time." I can tell members that I know it is not locked all the time, because whether there are kids or not, there are two doors. The front door may be locked, although I walked right in the one time I went there, and saw two young boys, but there is actually a side door as well that is not locked, and I confirmed that the door is never locked.

I challenge the next Liberal speaker, whoever it is, to address this. Think about the Bernardo victims. Look into the camera and say, "I'm okay with Paul Bernardo being in medium security. I'm okay with Terri-Lynne McClintic living next door to children." They will not do it. I am sure we are going to hear what I hope is not a prepared speech, but likely is, read verbatim. What does it say about us?

We need to implement this bill, not only because it is the right thing to do and not only because Canadians want it, but because justice, with a capital J, natural justice, demands it. The fact that other people in the House do not see that is a shame and a reflection on them.

● (1820)

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to speak to this private member's bill, Bill C-232. While seemingly well-intentioned, this is legislation the government cannot support. Our primary responsibility is to keep Canadians safe. To do this, we rely on laws and policies that are based on what has been proven to work. We know that the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders reduces recidivism and improves public safety.

Bill C-232 directly challenges this in a number of ways. First, it proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the CCRA, to require inmates who have been designated as dangerous offenders or who are convicted of more than one count of first-degree murder to be confined to a maximum-security penitentiary for the duration of their sentence. This would apply even if a sentence is finite, which would mean an offender is eventually released into the community.

Private Members' Business

The designation of an offender as maximum security is a necessary measure to maintain the safety and security of penitentiaries and to protect public safety. The decision to reclassify maximum-security inmates as medium security is made only after rigorous and thorough assessment of the offender's case-specific risk factors. This includes an inmate's history and any dangerous offender designation, offence severity, potential for violent behaviour, outstanding charges, security-related incidents and their progress while in custody. It is the product of several criteria and considerations that are consistent with the principles of ensuring the protection of society, staff members and offenders.

While considering all case-specific factors, the security level is also determined based on Correctional Service Canada's assessment of the required degree of supervision and control within the institution, referred to as institutional adjustment, escape risk, and public safety risk in the event of escape. I would like to stress that at any point, an inmate can be returned to a higher security level, if this is deemed necessary to ensure the safety of the public or our institutions.

Research shows there are better public safety outcomes when an offender's rehabilitation is gradual and structured. Research shows this. However, maximum-security institutions offer fewer opportunities for rehabilitative programs, such as education, domestic violence, substance abuse treatment, and jobs and skills training. By limiting access to this programming and conditional release for certain offenders, the bill could compromise the safety of staff and other inmates within our facilities by creating a more volatile and less manageable institutional environment. It could also undermine effective rehabilitation and safe reintegration, as inmates will be less likely to have a gradual, supervised release into the community once they have completed their sentence. Bill C-232 would ultimately endanger public safety upon an offender's release, as they would be released with less preparation and fewer tools to be a productive member of society.

The bill also presents a significant charter concern, particularly given its application to current inmates. It would impact the prospects for conditional release for individuals already serving sentences under existing laws. This retrospective application challenges the fundamental principles of justice and fairness, with case law finding retrospective application in similar situations unconstitutional, in particular when punitive in nature. Our correctional system must operate within the bounds of the rule of law and the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter.

I would also put forward to the House that we should be careful not to exacerbate the known issue of overrepresentation of indigenous and Black offenders at the maximum security level and within the criminal justice system overall. The Government of Canada understands that an equitable justice system is an effective justice system. That is why we continue to make major investments to address gaps in services to indigenous people and their overrepresentation throughout the criminal justice system.

I will state that the federal framework to reduce recidivism, launched in June 2022, was an important step by the Government of Canada. It is a plan that identifies crucial factors that impact why people reoffend and how to support safe and successful reintegration into the community.

• (1825)

Public Safety Canada and its portfolio organizations continue to support whole-of-government efforts to align legislation, programs, policies and initiatives with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The indigenous community corrections initiative was created in that spirit to provide culturally relevant services to healing, alternatives to incarceration and rehabilitation to indigenous offenders. We must continue taking steps to address the systemic issues within our justice system, and we cannot support a bill that would deepen these inequalities.

Finally, while private members' bills do not typically include funding attachments, Bill C-232 would have significant, unavoidable financial impacts. Mandating certain security classifications for specific offenders would necessitate long-term infrastructure costs, as existing facilities would need expansion or modification to accommodate the resulting population shifts. The government's position on Bill C-232 is clear. This bill would undermine public safety and be a step backward in correctional policy. It also raises serious legal and practical concerns that we cannot ignore.

Bill C-232 is a misguided approach that ignores the evidence of what works to keep Canadians safe. It threatens the safety of our institutions and communities, and it would undermine the very principles of justice that our correctional system is built upon. We must continue to support policies that are evidence-based, that respect the rule of law and that focus on the safe and successful reintegration of offenders into society.

Rehabilitation is not a gesture of leniency. It is a fundamental pillar of public safety. When an individual completes a sentence and is released, the most critical question is whether they return as a person who is equipped to contribute to society or as someone who will become a repeat offender. Since most incarcerated individuals will eventually be released, if we only focus on punishment without addressing what led to the behaviour, such as addiction, lack of education or mental health struggles, we are effectively choosing to put public safety at risk.

For all of these reasons, I urge my fellow hon. members to oppose—

• (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The time provided for the consideration of this item of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

Pursuant to Standing Order 37, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-224 under Private Members' Business.

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from November 17, 2025, consideration of the motion that Bill C-224, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (natural health products), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Dan Mazier (Riding Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government declared a war on natural health products, not on opioids, fentanyl or drugs. No, it declared a war on vitamins and herbal medicines. The Liberals are targeting the mother who takes a supplement for her joints because she is waiting eight months to see a specialist. They are targeting the father who takes fish oil every morning because his doctor told him to watch his heart. They are targeting the child who takes Flintstones Vitamins at breakfast to strengthen their bones.

Let us be clear about who uses natural health products in this country. These are not fringe Canadians. These are millions of ordinary people who are doing exactly what we should want them to do, taking responsibility for their own health and wellness on their own terms, but they are precisely whom this government chose to go after. The government is not going after the pharmaceutical companies that got Canadians hooked on opioids or the fentanyl traffickers who are killing Canadians. The government is going after the Canadians who are standing in the aisles of a grocery store, reading a label and making an informed decision about their health.

In 2023, very deep inside Bill C-47, an omnibus budget bill, the Liberals quietly reclassified natural health products as therapeutic products under the Food and Drugs Act. This is the same legal category as prescription drugs. Should a scoop of protein powder fall under the same regulations as insulin? Should a multivitamin be placed in the same category as Tylenol? I certainly do not think so, and neither do Canadians, so why did the Liberals bury this policy in a budget bill? They said, “Hey, we want to regulate vitamins like pharmaceuticals.” In a stand-alone bill, it never would have survived public scrutiny, so they hid it in a budget bill and hoped Canadians would not read the fine print, but they did, and now the consequences are unfolding in Canada.

People at one in five companies within the industry say regulations are forcing them to consider shutting down. At three out of four companies, they say there is a high chance they will have to pull products from shelves. At 83% of companies, nearly the entire sector, they say they have little to no capacity to absorb the cost. The irony of the decision is that, when the government over-regulates Canadian businesses out of existence, it does not stop Canadians from buying supplements. In fact, it drives them online to American companies that are not subject to Health Canada's regime at all.

Many of the natural health products being sold directly to consumers in Canada do not even have an NPN, which is the natural product number required for Canadian standards. The government's crackdown on Canadian businesses does not make Canadians safer. It actually makes them less safe, while gutting Canadian jobs in the process. This policy is clearly regulatory overreach that serves no one but the bureaucrats at Health Canada who designed it to protect their own jobs.

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Let us be honest about what the Canadian health care system looks like right now. Six million Canadians do not have a family doctor. The average wait time to see a specialist is around 30 weeks. Canadians are making decisions about their health in the waiting room of a walk-in clinic because that is the only option available to them. That is the reality. Because of that reality, natural health products are the lifeline for many Canadians. This matters because a system already at the breaking point cannot afford to lose something helping to keep people out of the system. When Canadians stay healthier through prevention, they are not just helping themselves. They are helping the health care system that desperately needs relief. If the government were serious about improving the health of Canadians, it would focus on the national tragedy unfolding on our streets and in our hospitals.

The pharmaceutical industry has done incredible things for humanity. The products developed over the last century have extended and saved countless lives. When Canadians are sick, they need those products, and I am grateful that they exist, but the pharmaceutical model is fundamentally a reactive one. It is primarily designed to treat illness. That is not a criticism; it is simply what it does.

● (1835)

On the other hand, the natural health product model is fundamentally a preventative one. Vitamins and supplements are products Canadians use to stay healthy and prevent illness. That difference in purpose reflects a difference in how these industries operate. The pharmaceutical industry invests billions in drug development because it protects the patent. It recoups its investment over the life of that patent, and that model funds research and trials and ultimately the treatments Canadians need.

On the other hand, natural health products work differently. One cannot patent a natural vitamin. One cannot own vitamin D, for example. These are naturally occurring substances available to any company in an open market. This model drives down prices for consumers and creates a very competitive market. My point is that these are not just different products. They are fundamentally different business models, and they were never designed to operate under the same rules.

Underneath this fight over natural health products, there is something more fundamental at stake, and that is trust. Canadians came out of the pandemic with increased skepticism toward institutions and health care. They watched governments make decisions that affected them deeply, often without explanation, and sometimes without accountability.

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When the Liberals quietly reclassified the natural health products that millions of Canadians use every single day, that trust eroded again. We should remind ourselves that Canadians are capable of making informed and responsible decisions about their well-being.

That brings me to the most important point of all, which is who is actually standing up to fix this. The Conservatives are. My colleague the member for Ponoka—Didsbury has once again stepped up on behalf of millions of Canadians. He has introduced Bill C-224, an act that would amend the Food and Drugs Act. As the Conservative shadow minister for health, I fully support it.

Bill C-224 would remove natural health products from the same regulatory category as pharmaceuticals and restore the made-in-Canada framework that protects both consumer safety and Canadian industry. It would ensure that Canadians could continue to access the protein powders, vitamins, probiotics and supplements they rely on every single day while protecting the competitive Canadian businesses that make them. I believe Canada should regulate a vitamin like a vitamin, not like a prescription drug.

Conservatives believe Canadians deserve access to natural health products. We believe in personal responsibility and in a government that respects the decisions Canadians make about their health. If we are serious about the long-term sustainability of Canadian health care, we must treat natural health care products as part of the solution, not as a threat to be regulated out of existence.

Every Canadian who stays healthier longer through prevention is a Canadian who places less demand on an already overburdened health care system. That is good for patients, taxpayers and Canada.

To the millions of Canadians who use natural health products, who take a supplement every morning, who read the label and simply choose to invest in their own health, I say that we see them, we hear them and we are fighting for them. The government declared a war on their vitamins, but Conservatives are fighting back to save their supplements and protect natural health products.

Maggie Chi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak about Bill C-224. This is an important bill that impacts millions of Canadians who rely on natural health products as part of their daily health and wellness routines, and who want to know that the products they are using and consuming are safe.

I think all of us recognize that this bill has some ideas worth exploring. Our government is always open to ideas that help Canadian businesses thrive and ensure that Canadians have access to safe, effective natural health products. In fact, one of our new government's top priorities was to remove burdensome red tape in regulation. We have seen this promise in action in the natural health product sector. Our government heard from natural health product companies that they were finding that some new regulations were too onerous or did not do what they set out to do. In response, we paused some of these regulations and limited the scope of others.

Canada's natural health product industry is a huge part of the economy. We want to make sure that these companies can thrive, but we also want to make sure that Canadians can trust that the natural health products they rely on are safe, and that what they say on the label is what is actually in them. After all, the term "natural

health products" encompasses a wide range of products, and one only needs to look at the Health Canada recall page to see that. Sometimes mistakes are made. There can be mislabeled products or undeclared ingredients. In one extreme case last year, a range of multivitamins and supplements had to be recalled across Canada because they contained metal fibres. These recalls are rare, but they show how even seemingly safe products that are authorized and widely used can still have some risks.

That is what makes some regulatory oversight so important. Having food and drug safety regulations that ensure that the products on store shelves are safe, effective and of high quality helps Canadian consumers and Canadian companies alike. These regulations build trust and confidence in the system. Consumers trust that the products on store shelves are what they say they are, while businesses get to operate on a level playing field. It also makes Canada a more attractive destination for companies looking to expand, because they know that we have a regulatory system in place that maintains some of the highest food and drug safety standards in the world.

An unintended consequence of Bill C-224 is that, rather than simply reducing the regulatory burden on natural health product companies, it could make people less certain about the products they are using.

Under the current laws and regulations, the Minister of Health has a number of important powers. They can order a product recall. They can require changes to labels or packaging. They can request additional information about a product when they suspect the product poses a serious risk to human health. They can issue fines against companies that refuse to take unsafe products off the shelf. These are all important tools to protect consumers, and the way it is currently written, the bill would remove these tools altogether.

I know that the bill's sponsor, the member for Ponoka—Didsbury, is a long-time advocate for natural health products. During the previous Parliament, he introduced the forerunner of this bill, Bill C-368, which had many of the same provisions.

I will pause here to note that one important difference between Bill C-368 and Bill C-224 is that the current bill does not exempt nicotine products from the Food and Drugs Act, which is a significant improvement. Both bills are a considerable attempt to help natural health product companies continue to grow and thrive. This is a goal all of us share.

It is certainly a goal of our new government. It is why we have been working closely with our natural health product industry stakeholders as part of our red tape review to streamline and reduce unnecessary regulatory burden. Thanks to the red tape review, Health Canada is shifting to a risk-based approach to oversight that will reduce pre-market requirements for natural health products, while shifting direct oversight and resources to higher-risk areas. It also put a pause on new labelling requirements and is continuing to work with natural health product companies to address their concerns.

We also recognize that a key part of working with the natural health product industry is flexibility. We cannot just apply a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach. One of the important pieces of legislation passed by the previous government was Bill C-69, which gave the Minister of Health the flexibility to respond to urgent and emerging regulatory challenges as they arise with tailored options and solutions. In a world where both industry and government are constantly facing evolving challenges, this kind of flexibility is essential.

This important work needs to continue, and I think there is room within the current bill to allow it to continue, which is why I look forward to voting for this bill and studying it at the health committee.

• (1840)

However, we also need to make sure there are rules and regulations in place to protect Canadian consumers. When Canadians reach for a product on a store's shelves, they need to have confidence in its safety and trust that the label accurately represents the product. If they do not have that confidence, if they cannot trust the product they are buying, it will hurt the entire natural health products industry and, by extension, our economy.

There is an important balance we need to find, and I hope we can study this bill at committee to make sure it strikes the right balance, one that ensures Canadians can have peace of mind when it comes to the products they buy and that Canadian natural health product companies have the tools they need to grow and thrive.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill C-224. Introduced by my Conservative colleague for Ponoka—Didsbury, this bill aims to amend the Food and Drugs Act to exclude natural health products from the definition of therapeutic products. In practical terms, if this bill passes in its current form, natural health products will no longer be subject to the same oversight mechanisms as other therapeutic products, including those set out in Vanessa's Law.

Let us briefly revisit the reason for this law. Vanessa's Law was enacted in 2014 following the tragic death of Vanessa Young. It aims to enhance the powers of the Minister of Health to better protect the public from unsafe products. For instance, Vanessa's Law allows the minister to order manufacturers to disclose information, to require a label change, to prohibit the sale of a product and, most importantly, to order a recall of products that present a serious health risk.

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For a long time, natural health products were excluded from those powers. However, these products are not always harmless. Probiotics, vitamins, minerals, herbal remedies and traditional medicines are now a huge industry. In Canada, this market is estimated to be worth between \$4 billion and \$5 billion per year, and these products are widely used. It is estimated that that 73% of Canadians use this type of product on a regular basis. The term "natural" inspires confidence, but it must be made clear that "natural" does not mean "harmless". "Natural" does not mean "without side effects" and does not mean "without supervision".

These products can interact with prescription drugs, cause serious adverse reactions and, in some cases, have very serious consequences. Consider, for example, the known interactions between certain supplements and prescription drugs that can reduce the effectiveness of a treatment or increase health risks. Members might also recall the sad case of Michel Joannette, who developed hepatitis after consuming a natural product he bought online to help him lose weight. These situations remind us of a simple reality: Just because something is natural does not automatically mean it is safe.

In 2021, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development published a troubling report on Health Canada's oversight of these products. The report concluded that the department's oversight had failed to ensure their safety and effectiveness. The commissioner identified several significant problems. First, Health Canada could not order the mandatory recall of a natural health product, even in the presence of a serious health risk. Second, there were significant gaps in the inspection of manufacturing facilities. Post-market surveillance was also insufficient, and the department did not always have the necessary tools to effectively detect unlicensed products or misleading advertising.

The numbers speak for themselves. The number of reports of adverse effects associated with these products rose from 22,211 in 2010 to 96,559 in 2019. In light of these findings, the federal government decided to take action. In 2023, under Bill C-47, these products were made subject to certain provisions of Vanessa's Law. The department can now impose mandatory recalls when public safety is at stake. However, Bill C-224 would reverse that decision.

Let me be clear. We in the Bloc Québécois recognize that natural health products should not be treated exactly like prescription drugs. They belong in a distinct category. They cannot be treated as simple food products, either. In our view, the position is simple and balanced. Natural health products are not drugs, but nor are they risk-free. They must be strictly regulated. The key question, then, is this. Are we going to weaken public health protection measures?

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● (1850)

In its current form, Bill C-224 raises a major concern. If it were passed as is, the minister could lose the ability to impose a mandatory recall when a product poses a danger to the public.

Imagine for a moment a product contaminated with bacteria such as *E. coli*. Without this recall power, we would be relying solely on the manufacturer's goodwill to have the product removed from shelves. It would put us back in a situation that the Auditor General himself deemed inadequate. It would be a step backwards, one that we should not take.

That said, the Bloc Québécois believes that this bill deserves serious consideration in committee. That is why we will support the bill at second reading so that it can be examined in depth. However, we will be very clear on one thing. Our final support will depend on one essential condition: The bill must maintain mandatory recall power. Public protection must never be weakened in the name of deregulation.

Quebeckers must be able to have complete confidence in what they consume. This means that what is sold on the market must meet rigorous standards, have clear labelling and make truthful claims, and the government must have the tools it needs to intervene when public health is threatened. Clear regulations protect consumers, but they also protect reputable businesses that follow the rules.

This is a simple matter, really. Just because a product is popular does not mean that it is effective or safe. The legislator's primary responsibility is still to protect public health. The Bloc Québécois will therefore keep an open mind about this bill, but there is a very clear line that we will not cross. Public safety must always come first.

[English]

Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been a few issues over the last few years that I have heard consistently so much about, and this is not just in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk but across the entire country. Among those, the cost of living, the erosion of freedom and individual choice ranked very high at the top. The bill that we are debating today goes to the very heart of the fundamental concerns that Canadians are raising. This bill is not just about natural health care products. It is about freedom of choice. It is also about affordability and whether Canadians can still afford the basic essentials that they have always counted on every single day.

I am not sure that most members of the House have experienced a time when they have been without a doctor. I know they have experienced waking up with a potential cold, sore throat or cough and possibly considered using vitamins to fight that cold, purchasing some sort of alternative care such as vitamin C or echinacea, or even drinking medicinal tea. Those common remedies are not uncommon products. They are part of ordinary Canadian life. In fact, a strong majority of Canadians, 70%, rely on vitamins or other natural health products. They do so regularly to stay healthy during the long winter seasons. They also use them to supplement their diets. These are not luxury items.

For many of my constituents, these products are not optional. They are essential for their health and their well-being, and for the well-being of their families. That is why I am proud to speak in support today of the common-sense bill from my hon. colleague, the member for Ponoka—Didsbury, Bill C-224, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act regarding natural health care products.

Bill C-224 moves to reverse the sweeping changes that the government made in 2023 to the Food and Drugs Act, which changed how natural health products are regulated in Canada. Prior to 2023, natural health products were already regulated under the natural health products regulations, which is a robust and clear framework introduced by the previous Conservative government under former prime minister Stephen Harper. That framework provided sufficient oversight and safety, and recognized that vitamins are not pharmaceuticals.

Since the Liberals changed the requirements in 2023, natural health products must now comply with an onerous labelling regimen, additional inspections, compliance measures and mandatory recall orders, as well as additional government fees and the threat of a monetary penalty of up to \$5 million per day for non-compliance. These same rules are used to regulate pharmaceuticals and prescription drugs. The question that many Canadians have written to my office to ask is, why is the government treating small Canadian vitamin-brand businesses like high-risk pharmaceutical manufacturers?

Conservatives are not against regulation. There is a place for wise and precise government regulation. Regulations are meant to protect Canadians, to reduce the risk of harm and to provide the necessary guardrails against misuse and abuse, but regulations must be proportionate. With little regulation, people obviously could get harmed, but with too much regulation, government moves from protection to control. It begins to dictate free choices, saddle businesses with red tape and distort the marketplace. As a result, innovation becomes stifled. Canadian businesses ultimately suffer, and Canadians lose choice while paying higher costs.

● (1855)

When products disappear, choice shrinks. When compliance costs rise, prices increase. When domestic producers exit, foreign competitors fill that gap. Unfortunately, Canadians are seeing this pattern across multiple sectors: housing, agriculture, natural resources and energy.

Government red tape has already cost Canadian businesses over \$50 billion every single year. Small and medium-sized businesses, which are the backbone of our economy, bear the heaviest burden. Ultimately, Canadians pay the price.

We must also consider this. Six million Canadians are without a family doctor. Millions more are on wait-lists for treatments and procedures. At the same time when Canadians are navigating a strained health care system, we should not be making it harder for them to responsibly manage their own well-being, yet, under this regulatory regime, that is exactly what is happening. Industry associations, small businesses, health practitioners and consumers are all raising the alarm, and 70% of brands say that they may pull their products from Canadian shelves. One in five may exit the Canadian market entirely. At a minimum, prices will rise at a time when families are already struggling. Make no mistake: Without Bill C-224, businesses will shut down or leave the Canadian market, and Canadians will lose access to products they rely on.

My office has been overwhelmed with calls, letters and petitions about this issue over the past three years. This matters deeply to Canadians. The people of Haldimand—Norfolk elected me to represent their voice, to speak the truth and to push back when government overreach threatens their autonomy. Canadians want to return to a country where choice, affordability and personal responsibility are respected by government. That is why this is not a partisan issue. The bill speaks to the fundamental values that matter to every single Canadian: freedom, autonomy and the dignity of an affordable life.

This bill is not just about natural health products; it is about freedom of choice. In the previous Parliament, we saw cross-party support for this legislation. I urge all members to once again support this common-sense bill, not only in the interest of millions of Canadians who rely on natural health products and Canadian businesses that work every single day to supply products in a safe and responsible manner to Canadians who desire those products, but also in the interest of Canadians across this country and future generations who want to live in a Canada where freedom of choice abounds, where businesses thrive and where life is affordable. The full promise of Canada deserves nothing less.

• (1900)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament, the Liberals put forward Bill C-47, a budget bill that had buried within it provisions that attacked access to natural health products and attacked the natural health product industry. This was not stand-alone legislation. There was no consultation with the people who were affected. It was simply an effort to sneak through legislative changes attacking natural health products, buried in a budget bill.

Conservatives opposed that budget. We opposed the fiscal direction the government was taking, and as part of that, of course, we opposed the attack on natural health products. We tried to bring attention to this legislatively sneaky and substantively harmful action by the government of attacking Canadians' access to natural health products. Following that, my colleague from the Red Deer area put forward legislation to reverse the changes.

Now, in the new Parliament, there is a bill trying to restore the previous situation with respect to access to natural health products. That is now Bill C-224. I commend my colleague for this important work to restore the long-standing, well-functioning, pre-existing system for access to and regulation of natural health products and

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to undo the sneaky Liberal changes that were contained in their massive omnibus budget legislation.

At issue here is whether natural health products are subject to the same levels of regulation, administrative burden, etc. that are associated with pharmaceuticals. In many cases, when we are talking about natural health products, we are talking about vitamins and minerals, which people take to replace what may be deficiencies in their diets. There are certain nutrients, vitamins and minerals that we are designed as human beings to have as part of our diet, but for whatever reason, perhaps it is where we are, what we eat or aspects of what foods we have access to, some people have certain deficiencies in vitamins or minerals, which we seek to make up for through this kind of supplementation.

However, in the case especially of vitamins and minerals, we are talking about the very natural effort to restore what had historically been part of our diet as humans, to ensure that we are taking in products that are naturally required for the normal, healthy functioning of the human person. One example that gets cited often is vitamin D. We live in a cold country, if anyone had not noticed, which means that people spend relatively less time outside here, living in Canada, than they might have in other places and times, where our ancestors came from.

This means that generally we have lower levels of vitamin D, which is a vitamin we can get through exposure to the sun. In fact, I think there was a lot of good data during the COVID period identifying that there were greater risks associated with COVID for people with vitamin D deficiency. I think this was well established and well documented, and I encouraged the government at the time to share and promote this information.

Many Canadians, recognizing the importance of having the vitamins and minerals that we are supposed to have, and recognizing the risks of deficiencies, choose to supplement their diet with these kinds of natural health products. Applying the levels of regulation that are associated with pharmaceutical interventions just does not make sense. It clearly is a miscategorization, an application of the wrong kind of regulation, and I think this is widely understood and widely appreciated.

The changes the government snuck into its omnibus budget bill did not make sense substantively and did not respect the choice of Canadians. Regardless of an individual's particular opinion about a natural health product, we have the means of accessing information about them, and individuals can and do make considered choices about this. We do not need an overly paternalistic government telling people that they must have the same regulation for vitamins and minerals as is applied to pharmaceutical products.

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• (1905)

I am strongly in support of this bill. It aligns with choice. It recognizes the realities of the benefits of these products, benefits that many Canadians have seen and understand.

Briefly, I want to comment on a related issue, which is access to training for allied health professionals. In the course of my work as the shadow minister for employment, I have been speaking a lot with people in the field of traditional Chinese medicine who are very concerned about a change that was snuck into this year's budget bill. The government is proposing to cut off student grants to students attending private for-profit institutions, which is where the vast majority of students in Canada studying to become traditional Chinese medicine practitioners go.

We have a situation where the government is making changes, buried in a budget bill, that attack access to natural health products. Then we have a case where, again buried in a budget bill, the government is attacking access to training for those who are practising traditional Chinese medicine. This makes it very difficult for people in the Chinese community but also for people outside the Chinese community who benefit from or rely on traditional Chinese medicine to access these kinds of services.

In a free multicultural country, we want Canadians to have choice and flexibility and to be able to access the wisdom and experience of other cultures and other traditions. I think there is value in people having the choice and the flexibility to do that without the government proceeding with multiple attacks against these communities, which are always, it seems, buried in budget bills.

I commend my colleague for undoing or seeking to undo the damage the Liberals have done in terms of access to natural health products. This bill, Bill C-224, is a great bill that is trying to undo that damage. We will continue this work as we see more persistent attacks from the Liberals on this community.

Of all the problems we face in this country, it is hard to understand why it has been a priority for the Liberals to make life more difficult for people who are trying to take vitamins or trying to access acupuncture but are worried they would not be able to as a result of these changes to student grants. I would ask the government why, with all the problems in this country and all the problems in the world, it chose this attack on responsible, law-abiding citizens who simply are trying to exercise choice and trying to be healthy. That is a question that maybe we will hear an answer from the government on at some point.

I look forward to hearing from my colleague, the sponsor of this bill. It is a great bill. I look forward to supporting it and supporting the people in my riding and across the country who rely on natural health products to maintain and manage their health.

• (1910)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I will invite the hon. member for Ponoka—Didsbury for his five-minute right of reply.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of my colleagues who spoke in the House tonight, in the second hour of debate on Bill C-224. As has been mentioned, this is the second Parliament I have tabled this bill in. In the previ-

ous Parliament, it was Bill C-368. It passed at second reading in this place, but it was not unanimous. It went through the committee process in the last Parliament, but it died on the Order Paper with the prorogation and subsequent election.

Now we have a new Parliament, and I was very fortunate to get drawn in the first tranche of private members' business. I was more than happy, on behalf of the 80% of Canadians, some 30 million, who use natural health products on a routine basis to improve the quality of their lives at a time when it is hard enough in this country to make ends meet, to get by, to find a doctor and to look after oneself. It seemed pretty straightforward and easy for me to get behind this cause.

Not only am I a user of these natural health products myself, but I know that so many friends and family members also do the same thing. All my constituents in Ponoka—Didsbury, which in the previous Parliament was Red Deer—Lacombe, have been very supportive of what I have done. I have travelled across the country to meet with health store owners, various stakeholders and Canadians on a regular basis about this. It is a very important issue, and I am glad that we are having this conversation today.

As members may recall, in the previous Parliament, the definition of "natural health products" was changed in Bill C-47, which was a budget implementation bill. Nobody knew this was coming. It was underhanded and sneaky. That was the approach of the previous government in the previous Parliament. There was no consultation with the Natural Health Product Protection Association or the Canadian Health Food Association. Nobody even knew it was there. As a matter of fact, there was basically radio silence for about six months, until somebody figured out that those four little clauses in that bill had been passed and subsequent changes to the self-care framework were being implemented by Health Canada. That is when the lid kind of blew off the whole process and people started getting involved.

To take us back to where we were, this is not some wild west, non-regulated area of responsibility. Natural health products have been very highly regulated in Canada for a long time. As a matter of fact, IADSA, the International Alliance of Dietary/Food Supplement Associations, not therapeutic drugs but dietary food supplements, basically had Canada's regulatory regime ranked as the gold standard around the world. We were exporting these products because importers and agencies from around the world trusted that made-in-Canada label and the natural product number. This was a solution in search of a problem, and it blew up in the government's face.

There is no reason at all that natural health products should get caught up in the clutches of Vanessa's Law, a very important piece of legislation and work. We need to treat natural health products for what they are. They are a stand-alone category, and my bill seeks to take us back to where we were prior to Bill C-47. I made one small adjustment to the bill in this Parliament to exempt nicotine, because I believe many people would think it reasonable that nicotine should be managed completely differently and separately from natural health and therapeutic products. I am looking forward to my colleagues having that debate, should this bill get to committee.

I want to thank my colleague in the Bloc Québécois. I think he was a little upset that I did not include the amendment to deal with recall. I know that is going to come up again in the debate, should this bill get to second reading.

Before I conclude, I want to extend some thanks, if I can be permitted, even if I go a bit longer. I want to thank the Natural Health Product Protection Association, specifically Shawn and Teresa Buckley, for their continued advocacy for freedom of choice for Canadians on this issue and so many more. I thank them so much for the work they do. To the Canadian Health Food Association, particularly Jules, Sonia and Wenjing, I thank them so much for the work they do in advocating on behalf of retailers and the entire industry, the producers, retailers, everybody.

Most importantly, I want to thank Canadians who are watching right now. As I said, 80% of Canadians use natural health products, and they support their own right to choose their health outcomes. They were the ones who signed the cards we all got, signed the petitions, wrote the emails and made the calls to MPs' offices. They have changed the tide of the debate in this country, and the House should be responding to them.

• (1915)

I am very much looking forward to the continuation of this bill as it goes through the legislative process. I want to thank everybody who has been supportive.

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.

The hon. member for Ponoka—Didsbury.

Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would request that the motion be carried unanimously.

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 Health.

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

Government Orders

Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent so that we can return to Government Orders.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 6—PROCEEDINGS ON BILL C-9

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are debating Bill C-9, in particular Liberal efforts to shut down debate on Bill C-9, to prevent any further debate at committee, in particular to shut down consideration of a Liberal-Bloc proposal to remove the religious defence. If successfully passed, this bill would allow the prosecution of individuals under so-called hate speech if they read religious texts in what the government deems to be the wrong way and the wrong situation. Those provisions, combined with the words of the heritage minister, who has said that reading from certain books of the Bible should be considered hate speech, have caused great alarm and the unanimous opposition, or close to unanimous opposition, of faith leaders across this country.

In the process, the Liberals have said that we should shut down debate because we have discussed this enough. They think we have discussed this enough. The religious exemption was not even studied at committee. No witnesses were called on the religious exemption at committee at all. Some members of the House have said, "Well, yes, but informally, members brought it up in discussion at other points in the committee." That is true, but there were no witnesses who were called, invited to testify or heard from on the issue of the religious exemption. It was merely something that the Bloc member brought up from time to time. This is something that has had no study at committee. To suggest that enough debate has occurred on the religious defence, when it has not even been studied at committee, is truly outrageous. The committee should be able to hear from witnesses on the removal of the religious defence, and it is not being allowed to.

Government Orders

Liberals have falsely claimed today that they have made changes and compromises to accommodate the concerns of religious communities. They have suggested that it is just Conservatives who have been recalcitrant in our opposition. The facts objectively show that all of the religious organizations and individuals who had concerns when the removal of the religious defence was initially proposed continue to have those concerns, in spite of the false claim that the government has somehow fixed the problem or clarified the language. Over 350 Muslim organizations signed the joint letter. The Toronto rabbinical council, various Christian organizations, and a broad range of faith leaders have highlighted their ongoing concerns, and I trust them. I listen to them to speak on behalf of their communities.

Liberals have said not to worry, because religious freedom is protected in the charter. We know that just because something is protected in the charter, that does not mean the government cannot move against it. It simply means there is a remedy in case the government does. Yes, in a case where the government violates someone's charter rights, that individual can raise the money required, take the issue through the various levels of court and maybe, hopefully, get a remedy at the end of that long process. In the meantime, they are constrained. There is a chilling effect, and they must go through this extensive process. We are better off not violating charter rights than violating them and then forcing individuals to go through this extensive process.

Finally, members of the government have, quite rightly, pointed out that there has been a massive spike in hate crimes in this country. In the last 10 years, while Liberals have been in power, there has been a significant increase in hate crimes, in particular targeting faith communities. Let us talk about the causes of that. One possible cause might be that the principal secretary of the previous Liberal prime minister, Gerald Butts, tweeted, at a time when churches were being spray-painted and burned, that these actions were “understandable”. In fact, the government at no point condemned these attacks on churches, and still has not.

Maybe if the Liberals are concerned about hate crimes, one natural step would be to be clear and precise in condemning acts of violence against faith communities. Maybe the government needs to reflect on how it has not effectively engaged with faith communities and listened to their proposed solutions, because when it comes forward with a bill that it says is going to address hate crimes against religious communities and every single religious community is against it, maybe we have a problem. Maybe it should listen to and engage with faith leaders when it is proposing legislation that is supposed to address hate crimes against faith communities. The government is so out of touch with the realities of these communities and with the problems it claims to solve, and the members have been so dishonest in today's debate, but we stand with all faith communities across this country in opposing this terrible bill.

• (1920)

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when someone wants to promote hatred, that is an offence. That is what we are talking about today.

There is a religious exemption that allows people to promote hatred based on a religious text. My colleague says we should keep that because it is part of religious freedom. He says people should have the right to promote hatred if it is based on religion.

Furthermore, he said at the beginning of his speech earlier that the government should not interfere in religious matters. The way I see it, religious matters are interfering in government matters. There is a law that says it is illegal to promote hatred. No church or person representing a church should be able to say it has that right based on its beliefs. I cannot fathom why my colleague does not understand that.

[*English*]

Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear that the issue is not whether or not a person can foment hate. I do not think there are any religious communities in this country that want to foment hate. The issue is who gets to decide what is and is not acceptable speech, because I do not trust the minister of heritage to decide what clergy in my church can and cannot say.

I believe these communities should be free to have their own conversations and their own debates. By all means, people should debate religious ideas. They should be free to criticize and disagree with religious ideas, as religious people sometimes do among ourselves, but the government should not be telling imams, rabbis and pastors what they can and cannot believe in the context of reading and sharing religious texts.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned the increase in the number of hate crimes. I believe it has gone up 85% since 2016. It all started with this division, inequality and exclusion. It divided Canadians. It seems like it was done intentionally.

Over the last 10-plus years, does the member think that perhaps the government was intentionally trying to divide Canadians, foment hatred, so it could bring in Bill C-9 and use it to muzzle us?

• (1925)

Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I always like questions from my Conservative colleagues. I do want to point out the general absence of Liberals from this conversation. I invite them to ask me questions to offer some explanation for why they introduced this provision to remove the religious defence. They have been keen to tell us what it would not do, but they have not offered any explanation of why they chose to propose the removal of this point.

Government Orders

To my colleague's point, I am reluctant to be too definitive in ascribing motives to other people. I suspect there are many people with good intentions, some with less good intentions, but looking at the reality over the last 10 years, we can see a big increase in hate crimes. I think the government should look in the mirror a little and ask what it could do differently to bring Canadians together.

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 am wondering if my colleague across the way could describe why he continues to obstruct after there has been the introduction of a “for greater certainty” clause that would address the concerns that Canadians have and clarify that it would absolutely not be prohibited to read scripture, to preach or to read a religious text under this legislation.

Why does the member opposite continue to obstruct this bill when we have clearly set out that the religious exemption and religious teachings have been protected in this bill?

Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, that is such a nonsense question that is objectively false. The member just said the religious defence has been protected. It has not been protected. This circular “for greater certainty” clause that says that something is not a hate crime if it is not a hate crime means nothing.

Moreover, the fact that it does not reassure me is not the point. It has not reassured any individual or group who had concerns initially. The Rabbinical Council of Toronto is not reassured. The 350 Muslim organizations are not reassured. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is not reassured. There is not a single organization that has said everything is fine now as a result of this nonsense “for greater certainty” clause. The Liberals should actually listen to faith communities if that is what they care about.

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 will be splitting my time with the member for Portage—Lisgar.

I rise today to speak to the motion before the House regarding the programming debate on Bill C-9, the combatting hate act. I do so at a moment when the urgency of this legislation could not be higher.

Over the past week, Canadians have, once again, been confronted with the disturbing reality of hate-motivated violence in our country. In Toronto, we have had gunfire at three synagogues over the past week. There are bullet holes in the buildings where members of the Jewish community, families and children, gather to pray and come together. I went to the Shaarei Shomayim synagogue and saw where the rounds cut through three layers of doors into the inner halls of the building. This is serious. This is criminal. This is a despicable act of anti-Semitic hate and intimidation.

When a synagogue is shot at in the middle of the night, the message is clear. It is an act meant to intimidate, to create fear and to send a signal to Jewish Canadians that they are not safe in their own communities.

In Toronto—St. Paul's, I have heard from families consistently over the past two-plus years about the rising sense of fear in our city. I have heard of protests in Jewish neighbourhoods that seek to hold a community responsible for events overseas, deliberately failing to distinguish between a diverse cultural and faith community here in Canada and the actions of a government abroad. As I have said before in the House, it is unacceptable for any Canadian to have to endure a torrent of hate to go to worship, to take their kids to school or to just go to work on any given day.

Stopping the fear and intimidation outside of places people can reasonably expect to gather or access services was a commitment that we campaigned on as a Liberal caucus last spring. When the Minister of Justice introduced this legislation earlier in this Parliament, we stepped up to fulfill this commitment. He spoke about the responsibility we have as legislators to ensure that Canada's legal framework keeps pace with the realities that our communities face. He spoke about the need to respond to law enforcement, who have asked for clarity in law.

This bill would strengthen the Criminal Code's response to hate-motivated conduct, including intimidation and the promotion of hatred against identifiable groups. These provisions are designed to protect Canadians in the most fundamental sense by protecting their right to gather, to worship and to participate in a society free from intimidation and fear. It would also prohibit the public display of symbols associated with listed terrorist groups in Canada. These are important gaps to clarify in our laws, and they are consistent with the Canadian approach to freedom of expression and to the prohibition of hate speech that has been a feature of Canadian law for over 60 years.

The government introduced this bill in the first week that the House returned in September, and here we are more than six months later. The time for filibusters and for delay has come to an end. If members of the House, and the opposition in particular, acknowledge that the attacks that we have been seeing are unacceptable, and if they acknowledge that anti-Semitism and other forms of hate are rising in Canada, then now is the time to move this legislation forward.

It is one thing to condemn hate in a statement or social media post. It is another thing to support concrete legislative changes to the Criminal Code that would protect Canadians from that hate. This is why this motion before the House today matters.

This is not about cutting off debate, as members opposite are claiming. The bill has been debated in committee since October of last year. This is about ensuring that the debate actually leads somewhere, that the committee completes its clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, that amendments are voted on and that Parliament can move forward in addressing a very real challenge in our country.

Government Orders

Opposition to this bill is rooted in misinformation. Canadians have a charter-protected right to freedom of expression. That right is vital to any well-functioning democracy. However, as Canadian courts have ruled repeatedly, this right is limited when an individual's actions infringe on the rights of others or cause harm to them.

• (1930)

Prohibiting hate speech is, and has always been, a reasonable limit on free expression. Prohibiting protests that impede access to community centres, schools or places of worship is a reasonable limit on free expression. Prohibiting the public display of hate symbols and symbols of registered terrorist groups is a reasonable limit on free expression. This balance is at the beating heart of the rights and obligations we have to one another as citizens protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

For the members opposite who see Bill C-9 as an unwarranted restriction on free expression or, worse, who twist and misrepresent the provisions of this bill to incite opposition on false grounds, it is time to stop. Jewish Canadians should not have to wonder whether Parliament will act when synagogues are targeted. Muslim Canadians should not have to question whether their mosques are safe. Members of racialized or LGBTQ communities should not have to fear that hate directed toward them will go unanswered. Every Canadian deserves to know that their Parliament stands firmly against hate in all of its forms. Bill C-9 delivers that commitment in line with the charter and with respect for the freedom of conscience and religion.

I have heard concerns and had discussions with faith communities in my own riding about the protection to read scripture and sacred texts. At committee, these were taken seriously. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice introduced a “for greater certainty” clause to make clear that legitimate religious expression and the quoting of sacred texts in good faith are not and will not be criminalized. Above all, the charter protects this right.

Let us agree that the status quo is not an acceptable option. Police forces have asked for clarity. Jewish Canadians have asked for protections. We want to see terror symbols off our streets. We expect fear and intimidation in our communities and neighbourhoods to stop. We want accountability for violent and hateful acts, and we want them prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. When synagogues are targeted by gunfire, when communities are living with fear and when hate crimes are rising across the country, Canadians expect their elected representatives to act responsibly and decisively. They expect us to work together. They expect us to move beyond procedural stall tactics in the House and in committee, and to focus on the safety and well-being of the people we serve.

That is what the motion allows us to do. It ensures that Parliament can complete its work on legislation that seeks to protect Canadians from hate and violence. Hatred thrives when institutions fail to respond, but Canada has always been strongest when we stand together, across faiths, across communities and across political lines, to defend the values that define this country. Those values include freedom, dignity and safety for every Canadian.

That is why this legislation matters. That is why I am going to be supporting the motion before us today.

• (1935)

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always intrigued by the fact that the Liberals are not really acquainted with the truth at all.

The member kept referring to misinformation, disinformation and falsehoods. She knows full well that the very things she described are not anything that this legislation would touch. It is already addressed in the Criminal Code. This would not change any acts of violence or criminal activity. This is about hate speech and hate expression.

My religious community and constituents outside of my religious organizations have bombarded me with emails, phone calls and letters asking me not to let this bill move forward, but to oppose it as long as I possibly can. They are not in favour of it, and I would like to see it end.

Leslie Church: Mr. Speaker, this bill actually does make very material changes to the Criminal Code. It establishes a new stand-alone hate offence. It creates a new offence around obstruction of places that communities gather. It creates a new offence around intimidation outside of places where communities gather.

What is most important about this is that all Canadians are seeking public safety and community safety in their neighbourhoods, so much so that police associations have asked us for this clarity in law. It never ceases to surprise me how the members opposite, who pretend to be strong on crime, cannot get behind a bill that actually provides law enforcement with the tools that they are asking for to be able to properly police, enforce and hold accountable the people who break the laws in our neighbourhoods.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to something important that we seem to have forgotten since this morning. The bill aims to remove the exemption that allows religious speech to promote hatred.

For ideological reasons, I will use another example: a socialist. Conservatives have a special fondness for socialists. A socialist could not promote hatred against individuals with a different ideology, say libertarians, and justify it in court. Someone who is religiously motivated can do so, however.

This means that my Conservative colleagues agree that it is possible to promote hatred on religious grounds. It is as simple as that. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Government Orders

[English]

Leslie Church: Mr. Speaker, getting back to the purposes of this bill is important because it is about creating and protecting freedom of religion and the freedoms of conscience and expression for all Canadians. No Canadian should have their rights stepped on and impeded when they are faced and confronted in their day-to-day lives in places where they gather by the types of hate and violent and intimidating acts that we have now, unfortunately, over two years of experience, seen on our streets. That is what this bill seeks to address. That is what we are fighting for here and what we intend to deliver for Canadians.

• (1940)

Maggie Chi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her hard work on this and for her community. Temple Emanu-El in my riding was targeted last week in the spate of violence towards synagogues, and these were clear acts of intimidation towards the Jewish community. I just want to ask the member to speak to the importance of the speedy passage of Bill C-9 and also to the importance of coming together to work towards peace and security.

Leslie Church: Mr. Speaker, the last week has been supremely difficult with the shootings that we have seen at synagogues in our beautiful city. It is imperative that we pass this bill with speed. We often talk about how the hate around us, the hate we see online and the hate we see on our streets normalizes hate for everyone. It empowers people who want to incite and spew hate.

Part of Bill C-9 is saying to all Canadians, “This is where we draw the line. This behaviour is not acceptable, and we are going to empower our law enforcement with the tools to be able to do something about it.” That is the core idea that we are trying to address with this bill and why I believe this is one of the most important commitments we are making to communities of different faiths, cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations right across the country. This is not unique to a single community. It actually touches all of us as Canadians.

Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating more than a procedural motion. We are debating the principle of how laws in this country are supposed to be made. What the Liberals are asking Parliament to do today is not simply to move a bill along. It is asking Parliament to cut short the process of scrutiny that exists for a reason. It is asking us to do that while amending the Criminal Code of Canada, the law that determines when speech crosses the line into criminal liability, and that matters. Once criminal law becomes regulating speech, the line between protecting Canadians and policing belief becomes dangerously thin.

Our parliamentary system was never designed to make passing legislation easy. It was in fact designed to make passing legislation difficult, and it was designed that way deliberately. The founders of our democratic system understood a simple truth that every generation, it seems, eventually has to relearn: When governments can change the laws too easily, the balance of power rarely remains with the people.

Our founders therefore built safeguards into the legislative process: multiple readings in the chamber, committee study, witness

testimony, and amendments debated line by line. Members raise concerns on behalf of the people who sent them here. We ask whether we have thought this through. Have we heard the arguments? Have we tested the consequences before the law is imposed on millions of Canadians?

That process is not a flaw in democracy. It is the safeguard that protects Canadians from bad laws. That safeguard matters even more when Parliament is amending the Criminal Code and touching freedoms protected by the charter. Difficult does not mean dysfunctional. Difficult means careful. Difficult means thoughtful. Difficult means Parliament takes the time to get the law right.

However, the motion before us today would do something very different. It would instruct the justice committee to immediately resume clause-by-clause consideration and vote through the remaining clauses and amendments without any debate. It would prevent the committee from adjourning until the bill is finished. It would limit debate in the chamber to a single day at report stage and a single day at third reading. In other words, the motion would sharply compress the opportunity for Parliament to examine the consequences of what we are doing in this place.

Some members have suggested that members raising concerns are simply trying to delay the bill, but there is a difference between delay and diligence. There is a difference between obstruction and representation. Members of Parliament do not arrive in the chamber carrying only their own opinions. We carry the voices of the people who elect us to be here.

Over the past weeks, members of Parliament from every party have been contacted by Canadians via emails, letters and phone calls. There have been hundreds if not thousands of them to each of us, all expressing concern about the proposed removal of the religious good-faith clause from Bill C-9. These Canadians are asking serious questions about freedom of religion, questions about freedom of expression and questions about where the line would be drawn when sincerely held beliefs are discussed in public. Those questions deserve to be heard in Parliament. That is not obstruction; that is representation.

It should also be said that there was a constructive path forward. Conservatives proposed splitting the bill. The provisions protecting places of worship and cultural centres could have passed relatively quickly. There is broad agreement across the chamber that Canadians must be able to practice their faith without intimidation or obstruction. Those changes could have become law quickly.

The remaining provisions affecting freedom of expression and the removal of the religious defence could then have been studied separately with the care that they deserve. That approach would have protected religious communities immediately, while still allowing Parliament to carefully examine changes to the Criminal Code. The government, shockingly, rejected this compromise. Instead of co-operation, it chose speed. Instead of scrutiny, it chose closure. Instead of debate, it chose control.

Government Orders

● (1945)

Part of what has raised these concerns is a decision made during committee. The government supported a Bloc Québécois amendment to remove the religious expression defence that has existed in the Criminal Code for more than 50 years. That safeguard was not inserted casually. When Parliament created Canada's modern hate propaganda laws in 1970, lawmakers understood a fundamental truth that the power to criminalize speech is one of the most serious powers that a state can exercise.

They built safeguards directly into the law. Truth was written into the Criminal Code as a legal defence. Public interest discussion was protected. Good-faith religious expression, grounded in sacred texts, was protected. Those protections were not merely afterthoughts. They were part of the balance that Parliament deliberately created.

The problem is not only with what the law could punish but also with what people began to fear saying at all. When criminal law moves into questions of belief, interpretation and moral conviction, the chilling effect spreads far beyond the courtroom. Faith leaders begin to wonder what can be safely said. A pastor quoting scripture at a sermon or a priest answering a theological question should not carry the shadow of a potentially criminal liability simply because someone disagrees with the belief being expressed.

For more than 50 years, Canadian law has tried to preserve that balance. Removing that safeguard is not merely a minor technical adjustment. It is a significant shift in how the law interacts with freedom of conscience and expression. When Parliament removes a protection that has existed in criminal law for more than half a century, the burden of proof should be clear. The government should be able to show Canadians exactly why such a change is necessary, yet the amendment was not part of the government's original bill. It appeared late in the committee stage.

Parliament is now being asked to accelerate the legislative process before Canadians have had the chance to fully understand the implications. What is striking in this debate is that the government has not provided a single concrete example explaining why this change is necessary. After weeks of discussion, no one has pointed to a prosecution that failed because of this clause. There is not one case, not one failed prosecution, not one real-world example.

When Parliament removes a safeguard that has existed in the Criminal Code for more than half a century, Canadians rightfully deserve to know why. They deserve to see the problem the government is supposedly trying to fix. That explanation has so far not been provided. Some will say that other protections remain. They will say that the charter still protects freedom of religion and freedom of expression, but that misses the point. When Parliament removes an explicit safeguard from the Criminal Code, it narrows the zone of certainty for Canadians. It sends a signal that a protection once considered essential is now considered unnecessary. This is not a decision Parliament should make lightly.

Across the country, religious leaders, civil society organizations and all sorts of diverse groups are raising concerns. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and those not of faith are saying the same thing, which is to slow down, listen and get it right. These are not radical voices. These are community leaders who care deeply

about the freedom of Canadians to live according to their own conscience, to their own values. When so many Canadians from so many different backgrounds raise the same concern, Parliament should take the time to listen. Instead, the government is choosing to move faster.

Strong laws should not and do not fear debate. Good ideas grow stronger when they are tested. When a government limits debate and accelerates legislation, Canadians inevitably begin to ask the simple question, why the rush? They ask this question especially when there are no real examples of why this change is necessary.

Parliament is not a rubber stamp. It is the place where the voices of Canadians are heard. It is the place where our laws are tested before they are imposed. It is the place where freedom is protected, not only by the words of legislation but by the care with which they are written. The question before us today is not simply whether a bill moves forward faster. The question is this: Do we still believe in the purpose of Parliament?

The duty of Parliament is not simply to pass laws. It is to guard the freedom of the people who live under them. It is to restrain power, and when those laws touch belief, conscience and expression, that duty becomes even greater. Let us take the time to get this right, because history teaches us a hard truth. Freedom is rarely taken all at once. It disappears gradually, one safeguard at a—

● (1950)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I have to go to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Jonquière has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said in his speech that the government had not presented any cases where hate speech had been uttered based on religious principles. In Quebec, there is the case of Adil Charkaoui, who called for the death of Jews. The director of criminal and penal prosecutions decided not to prosecute him because of the religious exemption.

My question for my colleague is very simple. Does he agree that Adil Charkaoui can call for the death of Jews without being prosecuted in court? Tonight, that is exactly what he is defending.

Government Orders

[English]

Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite. He should have been prosecuted. People cannot stand up and say things like he said in a public space, talk about exterminating certain types of people or incite specific violence against specific types of people. That is already in the Criminal Code. He most definitely should have been charged. He should be in prison for such vicious language and vicious incitement of violence. That is the problem. This bill would not change that.

The government needs to stand up. The prosecutors need to stand up and actually pursue the laws on the books and put people who are spreading hateful language like that behind bars.

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to actually get up to speak to Bill C-9, and here we have a closure motion to censor debate on Bill C-9, which is now going to be used to censor free speech and freedom of expression, as well as freedom of religion by actually outlawing some of our sacred texts in the Bible.

When I look at the charter, it leads off with, “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law”, and in clause 2, it says:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression

We are talking about actually now making parts of the Bible hate speech. That is what the Liberals have inserted into Bill C-9. We have to stop that if we believe in the Charter of Rights, in freedom of religion and freedom of expression, and if we believe in the “supremacy of God and the rule of law”. I will read from the book of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

I want to ask my colleague for Portage—Lisgar, who eloquently laid out all the dangers around what the Liberals are doing in their amendments to Bill C-9, is this actually more censorship and an attack on our freedom of religion?

Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, it absolutely is. I am glad my colleague touched on this. We are censoring a censorship bill. There is limited time for parliamentarians to discuss this particular amendment, although it is not the entirety of the bill itself. As I mentioned in my speech, the bill could have been split between elements that could provide protection for people of faith going to their religious institutions and cultural centres and this removal of a long-standing legal defence. To me, this is an effort to continue to censor what people see and say online and, frankly, what they believe.

There is no good reason to move forward with such an amendment to the Criminal Code, which has been upheld by the Supreme Court time and time again while it defended those very charter rights that my colleague rightfully pointed out are the primitive nature of our nation.

• (1955)

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very thoughtful and well-articulated words in this place regarding Bill C-9. I know there have been millions of Canadians across this country from

coast to coast to coast sounding the alarm. My office has heard from a plethora of constituents who reside not only in Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake but also outside, who have shared their concerns. They do not want to see the bill passed with this Bloc-Liberal amendment.

I wonder whether the member has experienced the same within his own riding.

Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I have not been in this place as long as my colleague and many others, but in my two and a half years as a member of Parliament, there has never been one single issue on which I have received so much correspondence, whether handwritten letters, emails or phone calls, yes, from my riding but from right across the country. People are concerned.

Government members have a lot of gall to sit there and say, “Well, you're all wrong. You just don't understand what we're trying to do. Sure, we haven't laid out why on earth we might need to make this change, but you are all wrong, so please just don't worry about it. Trust us.”

People are sick and tired of trusting the Liberal government when it comes to censorship.

Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to bring the voices of Chatham-Kent—Leamington to this chamber. Tonight I also bring the voices of millions of Canadians who are watching the House with a growing sense of alarm. We are debating Bill C-9, which is a piece of legislation that represents a radical assault on the fundamental freedoms of speech and religion in this country, but which the Liberal government masks in the language of safety.

The Conservative Party believes that every Canadian should be safe from violence. We believe that hate-motivated crimes are a stain on our society, but as my colleague, the member for Middlesex—London so aptly stated in this chamber, we do not need more vague, subjective laws that target the peaceful. We need the enforcement of existing laws that target the violent. Bill C-9 is not about stopping crime. It is about the Liberals deciding which thoughts are permissible and which sacred texts are hateful.

I cannot help but draw parallels between the government's approach to hate speech and how it approaches firearms. It targets legally vetted and trained firearms owners and does not address the scourge of gun violence from smuggled guns. Here, the government attacks the peaceful faith community as opposed to using existing laws. The Liberal justification for Bill C-9 is that Canada needs new tools to fight hate, but that is a myth. Our Criminal Code already contains robust protections against violent acts, threats and incitements of genocide, as well as criminal harassment. The problem is not a lack of laws. It is a lack of leadership. It is a lack of political will.

Government Orders

We are in this chamber today to debate the astounding desire of these Liberals to squeeze their weight of accountability as well by putting forward a programming motion that seeks to bypass the scrutiny of the House of Commons. The Liberals are seeking to bypass the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights by forcing “deemed moved” status on all amendments and forbidding adjournment until the bill is disposed of. This means no more debate. Again, I cannot help but think of the parallels between firearms and how the Liberals are trying to go ahead.

We offered to split this bill into the portions that were well agreed upon in this chamber and the contentious areas that we would debate and continue to look at. That offer was rejected. I think we would all like to know why there is such a rush to silence debate in the House and at committee. As someone of faith who is active in my own church community, I know that Canadians are not asking for more vague, subjective laws that police their speech. They are asking for a government that has the courage to enforce the laws we already have. They are asking for jail, not bail, for violent repeat offenders. They are asking for protection, not persecution, for the peaceful. Again, I think about how the Liberals are approaching firearms.

However, the reality for too many Canadians is that our streets are being ruled by repeat criminal offenders. The government's hug-a-thug bail reforms have created a revolving door where someone can be arrested for a violent assault in the morning and be back on the street by the afternoon. Instead of reversing these failed policies, the Liberals are focusing on Bill C-9, which targets the words of law-abiding citizens rather than the actions of violent criminals. Canadians want a justice system that puts the rights of victims above the rights of repeat offenders to terrorize their neighbourhoods.

This programming motion seeks to rush through a bill that would remove a critical constitutional bridge. For decades, the Criminal Code has protected those who express, and this is important, “in good faith” an opinion based on a belief in a religious text. This was not some loophole. The Supreme Court recognized that this defence is a constitutional necessity. It was the bridge that allowed our hate speech laws to coexist with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Bill C-9 seeks to dynamite that bridge. By removing this safeguard, the government is signalling that the Bible, the Torah and the Quran are no longer protected in the public square. If a pastor stands in a pulpit and reads a passage on traditional morality, or if a Rabbi speaks on the historical covenants of his people, they are now one subjective interpretation away from a criminal investigation.

We have already seen the former Liberal justice minister label portions of these texts as “clearly hateful”. When a minister of the Crown begins labelling scripture as hate and then introduces a motion to shut down debate on the very bill that would criminalize it, every person of faith of every faith should be deeply concerned.

● (2000)

The hypocrisy here is staggering. While the Liberals use priority House resources to rush Bill C-9, they have been utterly silent on the actual physical violence against houses of worship. This programming motion is a guillotine motion. It is actually a censorship

motion on a censorship bill, as has been stated numerous times throughout the debate today.

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute report shows that arson against churches has doubled. Thirty-three churches have been burned to the ground since 2021, including in indigenous communities like the Osoyoos Indian Band, where the congregation had to meet in a band council office because their church was in ashes. Over 96% of these arsons remain unsolved.

Furthermore, we see a 150% rise in hate crimes against our Jewish community. We see synagogues targeted and students harassed on campuses. Does Bill C-9 stop one brick from being thrown through a window? It does not. It does nothing to address the rise of anti-Semitism or the glorification of terror. It only empowers bureaucrats to police the speech of the peaceful. Where is the Liberal intensity for these crimes? Where is the bill to protect these sacred spaces?

The government's silence is deafening. It has no problem trying to keep faith out of the public sphere through legislation, yet it offers no protection for those same faith communities that are literally under fire. We are seeing the glorification of terror on our city streets, but instead of using the present Criminal Code, which already provides protections against violence, threats and incitement, the Liberals are focusing their resources, the House's resources, on Bill C-9. They are trying to make Canada unsafe for those who profess their faith, by removing legal protections while their hug-a-thug bail reforms allow repeat offenders to walk free. It makes no sense, unless they are actually trying to divide Canadians.

A Jewish family in Toronto or a Christian family in Ottawa should feel safe in their place of worship. Under this government, they are safe nowhere, not in the street, and soon not even in their own pews. I think of the people of my own congregation, or a member of my own staff who meets friends at a local coffee shop. They pray together, read scripture and discuss how to apply these ancient words to their lives. Under the vague definition of Bill C-9 and the removal of the good-faith religious defence, will my staff member be criminalized for a private conversation in a public space? Under this bill, and without the religious defence, a simple conversation in a public space could be interpreted as intimidating or hateful by a motivated activist. The bill does not provide safety. It provides a weapon for the state-sponsored harassment of people of faith.

What about the churches across this country, including those right here in Ottawa, that go into the streets every winter to provide food, scarves and warm clothing because their Bible tells them to take care of the least of these? This is the practice of faith in the public sphere, but if the government decides that the motivation behind that charity, the scripture itself, is hateful or intimidating, does that work become illegal? I would surely hope not.

This is not a slippery slope; it is a cliff. That is why Conservatives are fighting this programming motion, which seeks to push the justice committee to the point of not being allowed to adjourn until the bill is disposed of and to allocate only one day for report stage and one day for third reading, so the Liberal government will have accountability at the committee to not make the mistake of going over the edge of the cliff.

The Conservative Party will not stand by while the government uses procedural tricks to silence the concerns of literally millions of Canadians. We don't need Bill C-9 to tell us that violence is wrong or that hate speech is wrong. We need a government that actually punishes the violent. We need accountability for those who burn down churches and attack synagogues. We need to protect the constitutional rights of Canadians to live according to their conscience and their faith without fear of the state.

I call on the government to scrap this programming motion or to split the bill, as we have offered to do before. Let us focus on the real criminals and bring safety to our streets and freedom and safety to our places of worship. Let us unite Canadians instead of dividing them by their beliefs.

● (2005)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): It being 8:07 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of Government Business No. 6 now before the House.

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. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, I would like to call for a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Call in the members.

● (2050)

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

(Division No. 84)

YEAS

Members

Acan	Al Soud
Ali	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Bains	Baker
Bardeesy	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu

Beech
 Bendayan
 Blanchet
 Blois
 Brière
 Carney
 Casey
 Champagne
 Chang
 Chatel
 Chenette
 Church
 Connors
 Coteau
 Dandurand
 DeBellefeuille
 Deschênes
 Desrochers
 Dhillon
 Duclous
 Dzerowicz
 Ehsassi
 Erskine-Smith
 Fancy
 Fergus
 Fonseca
 Fortin
 Fraser
 Fuhr
 Gainey
 Gasparro
 Gerretsen

 Gould
 Guay
 Gull-Masty
 Hanley
 Hepfner
 Hodgson
 Housefather
 Iacono
 Jeneroux
 Joseph
 Kelloway
 Klassen
 Lalonde
 Lamoureux
 Lapointe (Sudbury)
 Lattanzio
 Lavack
 LeBlanc
 Lemire
 Long
 Ma
 MacDonald (Cardigan)
 Malette (Bay of Quinte)
 McGuinty
 McKnight
 Ménard
 Michel
 Miller
 Morrissey
 Naqvi
 Nguyen
 Normandin
 Oliphant
 O'Rourke
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Provost
 Rana
 Rochefort

Government Orders

Belanger (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River)
 Bittle
 Blanchette-Joncas
 Bonin
 Brunelle-Duceppe
 Carr
 Chagger
 Champoux
 Chartrand
 Chen
 Chi
 Clark
 Cormier
 Dabrusin
 Danko
 d'Entremont
 Deschênes-Thériault
 Dhaliwal
 Diab
 Duguid
 Earle
 El-Khoury
 Eyolfson
 Fanjoy
 Fisher
 Fortier
 Fragiskatos
 Fry
 Gaheer
 Garon
 Gaudreau
 Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
 Greaves
 Guilbeault
 Hajdu
 Harrison
 Hirtle
 Hogan
 Hussen
 Jaczek
 Joly
 Kayabaga
 Khalid
 Koutrakis
 Lambropoulos
 Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
 Larouche
 Lauzon
 Lavoie
 Leitão
 Lightbound
 Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
 MacDonald (Malpeque)
 MacKinnon (Gatineau)
 Maloney
 McKelvie
 McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
 Mendès
 Miedema
 Mingarelli
 Myles
 Nathan
 Noormohamed
 Ntumba
 Olszewski
 Osborne
 Petitpas Taylor
 Powlowski
 Ramsay
 Robertson
 Romanado

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Saini	Sarai	Johns	Kelly
Sari	Savard-Tremblay	Khanna	Kibble
Sawatzky	Schieffe	Kirkland	Konanz
Sgro	Sheehan	Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Kronis	Kuruc
Simard	Sodhi	Kusie	Kwan
Solomon	Sousa	Lake	Lantsman
Ste-Marie	St-Pierre	Lawrence	Lawton
Sudds	Tesser Derksen	Lefebvre	Leslie
Thériault	Thompson	Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Turnbull	Vandenbeld	Lloyd	Lobb
Villeneuve	Watchorn	Mahal	Majumdar
Weiler	Wilkinson	Malette (Kapusking—Timmins— Mushkegowuk)	Mantle
Yip	Zahid	May	Mazier
Zerucelli	Zuberi — 186	McCauley	McKenzie

NAYS**Members**

Aboultaif	Albas	Melillo	Mazier
Allison	Anderson	Moore	McKenzie
Anstey	Arnold	Morrison	McPherson
Au	Baber	Muys	Menegakis
Bailey	Baldinelli	Patzner	Morin
Barlow	Barrett	Poillievre	Motz
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)	Berthold	Reid	Nater
Bexte	Bezan	Reynolds	Paul-Hus
Block	Bonk	Roberts	Redekopp
Borrelli	Boulerice	Ross	Rempel Garner
Bragdon	Brassard	Ruff	Richards
Brock	Calkins	Schmale	Rood
Caputo	Chambers	Shiple	Rowe
Chong	Cobena	Steinley	Scheer
Cody	Cooper	Strauss	Seeback
Dalton	Dancho	Thomas	Small
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Tolmie	Stevenson
Davies (Niagara South)	Dawson	Van Popta	Stubbs
Deltell	Diotte	Viersen	Tochor
Dowdall	Duncan	Wagantall	Uppal
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Waugh	Vien
Falk (Provencher)	Gallant		Vis
Gazan	Généreux		Warkentin
Genuis	Gill (Calgary Skyview)	DeRidder	Zimmer — 140
Gill (Brampton West)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)	Jackson	
Gill (Windsor West)	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	Valdez	
Gladu	Godin		
Goodridge	Gourde		
Groleau	Guglielmin		
Gunn	Hallan		
Hardy	Ho		
Hoback	Holman		

PAIRED**Members**

Grant
Martel
van Koeverden — 6

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 8:52 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:52 p.m.)

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