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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 23, 2026

The House met at 11 a.m.

the objective that Bill C-242 aims to achieve. The difference is that our bill does so in a constitutional way.

Prayer

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 7(5) of the Auditor General Act, the spring 2026 reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

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

It would introduce over 80 targeted reforms to the Criminal Code. It was developed in collaboration with provinces, territories, police leaders, victims, survivors and justice system experts. Most importantly, it has the support of all 10 premiers in this country, across party lines. That matters, because when it comes to bail, the provinces administer justice. They run the courts, they hire prosecutors and they oversee policing resources, so when all 10 premiers tell us that Bill C-14 strikes the right balance, we should listen.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

JAIL NOT BAIL ACT

The House resumed from November 7, 2025, consideration of the motion that Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Department of Justice Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Maggie Chi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today to speak to Bill C-242, the Conservative bill on Canada's bail system.

I want to begin with something that unites every member of this House. Regardless of party affiliation, Canadians deserve to feel safe and be safe in their communities. They deserve to walk their streets, send their children to school and go about their daily lives with confidence that the justice system is there to protect them. They deserve a system that holds repeat violent offenders accountable, that supports a victim and that functions effectively on the ground, not just in theory but in real practice.

The reality is that good intentions are not enough.

The question before us is not whether we strengthen bail. The question is whether we do it in a way that is effective, constitutional and actually implementable. On that question, Bill C-242 falls short, while our government's bill, Bill C-14, the bail and sentencing reform act, delivers. Let me be clear: Bill C-14 already achieves

Compare that to Bill C-242. How does it differ? It has a series of changes that do not really consider the operational realities of our justice system. It would duplicate measures that already exist in Bill C-14, which is now being studied at the Senate. Where it goes in a different way, it does so in ways that raise serious constitutional concerns and practical risks.

Let us start with one of the central proposals, the so-called removal of the principle of restraint. Bill C-242 proposes to eliminate it from the Criminal Code. On its face, that might sound appealing, but it is fundamentally flawed. Unlike some claims from the opposition, the principle of restraint does not come from the Criminal Code alone. It comes from the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Antic*. That means it is binding law under our common-law system. Even if we deleted it from the statute, it would continue to apply, so Bill C-242 would not actually change the law, but create confusion and risk clogging up the courts, as lawyers argue over a principle that still exists but is no longer clearly codified.

Our approach through Bill C-14 is far more effective. We clarify the principle of restraint. We make explicit that it does not mean automatic release. We make it clear that detention is appropriate where public safety is at risk. That is how we strengthen the law, instead of pretending we can erase binding Supreme Court jurisprudence.

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Let us talk about repeat violent offenders, because that is where Canadians expect action. Bill C-242 would create a broad category of major offences and apply reverse onus provisions to these offences. Bill C-14 takes a different path. It would target the real problem by introducing reverse onus provisions for specific high-risk offences identified by police, provinces and municipalities, such as violent auto theft linked to organized crime, human trafficking, assault involving strangulation or extortion involving violence. This means that for these categories of offences, the starting point becomes detention, and it would be up to the accused to prove why they should be released on bail, rather than on the Crown to have to meet this high threshold.

Let us consider court capacity. Bill C-242 proposes that more accused persons must go through a judge for a bail hearing, removing the ability of the police to release individuals in a broader range of cases. It would also require that only judges grant bail in many situations. What would that mean in practice? It would mean more hearings, more delays, more pressure on already overburdened provincial courts, more strain on prosecutors and police resources and, most importantly, fewer guilty pleas. Provinces have been clear that they do not have the capacity for this kind of reform. Bill C-14 recognizes that reality and would maintain the existing framework while clearly guiding peace officers and the courts so that individuals who pose a real risk are not released.

• (1105)

Let me now turn to one of the most troubling aspects of Bill C-242, which is its treatment of non-citizens. The bill proposes mandatory passport surrender and distinct bail conditions based solely on citizenship status, but we are not the United States. In Canada, the charter guarantees “equality before the law”. Creating different bail rules for non-citizens risks violating these protections. It would open the door to legal challenges that could strike down these provisions entirely.

There is another concern here as well, one that goes beyond legal principles and speaks to who we are as a country. We must be very careful not to send the message that people who are not born in Canada are somehow more likely to be a threat to public safety. That is simply not true, and it risks unfairly stigmatizing entire communities that contribute every day to the strength of this country. Public safety is not advanced by dividing Canadians or by casting suspicion on newcomers. It is advanced by targeting real risks by focusing on behaviours, rather than identity. That is the standard Canadians expect from us, and it is one we must uphold.

This brings us to the broader contrast. Bill C-14 is the product of collaboration. Bill C-14 reflects input from the provinces, police, victim groups and experts, and it would deliver targeted reforms that are practical, constitutional and ready to implement. Bill C-242, in contrast, reflects a different approach. It is broad where it should be precise, it is rigid where it should allow judicial discretion, and in key areas, it proposes measures that legal experts, civil liberty organizations and constitutional lawyers would immediately flag as problematic.

Canadians expect better. They expect us to do the hard work of getting this right.

Let me say this directly to my colleagues opposite. If the goal is truly to strengthen bail and protect communities, then the path forward is clear. Bill C-14 is already before the Senate. It has the support of every single premier in this country, from the NDP premier in B.C. to the Conservative premiers in Alberta and Ontario and the nationalist premier in Quebec to the Liberal premier in New Brunswick, so why not deliver real tools to provinces and law enforcement, instead of advancing a bill that would duplicate what already exists and introduce unnecessary risks?

We all want safer communities and a justice system that works, but we must be honest about what will achieve that goal. Bill C-14 would strengthen bail in a way that is targeted, practical and constitutional. It reflects collaboration, not division. It would deliver results, not rhetoric. Bill C-242 would not meet those standards.

For those reasons, I urge all members of this House to support the serious and responsible work already undertaken in Bill C-14. I further call on my Conservative colleagues to press their Conservative colleagues at the Senate to expedite its passage so that law enforcement can begin using the tools they have clearly said they need to protect Canadians.

* * *

NOTICE OF MOTION AT REPORT STAGE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations, so I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, Special Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to the report stage of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places), Motion No. 1, standing in the names of the Members for Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, Brantford West and Elgin—St. Thomas—London South on today's Notice Paper, be replaced with the following:

“That Bill C-9 be amended by deleting the Short Title.”

• (1110)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay. It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

JAIL NOT BAIL ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Department of Justice Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give my regard to my colleagues on this Monday morning. I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to speak to Bill C-242 regarding interim release. I read the bill and examined it very closely. In short, this bill seeks to do 12 different things. Let us start with the first one.

First, it is important to remember that the bill seeks to replace the principle of restraint in section 493.1 of the Criminal Code with the principle of protection of the public. The Criminal Code currently provides for the principle of restraint, which is as follows:

493.1 In making a decision under this Part, a peace officer, justice or judge shall give primary consideration to the release of the accused at the earliest reasonable opportunity and on the least onerous conditions that are appropriate in the circumstances, including conditions that are reasonably practicable for the accused to comply with, while taking into account [other] grounds....

The bill aims to replace this principle with what is called the principle of public safety and protection, which the bill describes as follows:

493.1 In making a decision under this Part, a peace officer, justice or judge shall give primary consideration to the protection and safety of the public.

The wording in this part of the bill seems to be somewhat misleading. It seems to suggest that the principle of restraint does not ensure the protection of the public. However, when considering the legal implications of this provision, it appears that it would violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly section 11(d) of the charter. It calls into question the principle of the presumption of innocence.

Certain circumstances call for the use of reverse onus. I have used this myself, in Bill C-290, a bill I introduced in the previous Parliament that aimed to protect whistle-blowers. It is meant to be used in situations where it is impossible for a victim to prove their case. However, in this case, it seems fairly unacceptable to us.

Second, the bill proposes to do the following:

(b) add the protection of the public as a consideration

However, this does not mean that existing legislation and the government's proposals do not take public safety into account.

Third, the bill proposes to do the following:

(c) add several violent indictable offences...for the determination of judicial interim release.

Fourth, the bill seeks to prohibit release or allow additional restrictions within the judicial system for a very specific list of offences. Accordingly, the bill is proposing to do the following:

(d) create a list of major offences, composed of violent reverse-onus offences;

That is problematic in itself. As I said, the burden of proof can be reversed under certain circumstances, but depending on the circumstances, it could make it impossible for victims to provide evidence, and that seems problematic.

Private Members' Business

Fifth, the bill proposes to do the following:

(e) prevent those charged with a major offence from being released after arrest

This would significantly restrict the discretion and decision-making power of judges in various courts. Currently, the Criminal Code provides that the only offences for which the accused cannot be released are treason, intimidating Parliament, mutiny, sedition, piracy and murder. The Conservatives want to add a whole list of other offences to this.

This does not mean that the accused is automatically released when other offences are committed but, once again, it would remove a great deal of discretion from the courts, which are in a position to assess the evidence before making such a decision. Furthermore, this would mean that a person charged with the offences listed could not be released, whether arrested with or without a warrant.

Sixth, the bill proposes to do the following:

(f) require that only a superior court judge may determine, on a reverse-onus basis [which I mentioned earlier], whether to permit the interim release of an accused if the accused was charged with a major offence while they were on release in respect of another major offence and if they were convicted of a major offence in the last ten years;

• (1115)

This simply seeks to make it so that only superior court judges can authorize release on bail. Once again, this complicates the justice system's operation because, as we all know, criminal cases are not heard exclusively by superior courts. The Court of Quebec also hears them. Obviously, there are access to justice issues and backlog issues, and we are by no means certain that adding this constraint will necessarily serve the interests of justice. As we can see, we are not only dealing with principles here, but also with the operation of our justice system.

Seventh, the bill proposes to do the following:

(g) provide for the expiry of the interim release of an accused upon their conviction of an indictable offence while they await sentencing;

This is not uncommon for legal decisions. We cannot assume that judges are not already doing the very things included in this bill as they deem appropriate.

Eighth, the bill proposes to do the following:

(h) prohibit those who have been convicted of an indictable offence in the last ten years from being named as a surety;

That is fine. Nine, the bill proposes to do the following:

(i) require that a justice assessing judicial interim release consider whether or not an accused is a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident and, if not, whether they may attempt to leave the country;

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We know that judges can already deny bail if they determine that the accused really does represent a flight risk. In fact, bail is not granted in many cases. Subsection 515(10) of the Criminal Code already sets out three cases in which an accused person may be denied bail. They are as follows:

- (a) where the detention is necessary to ensure his or her attendance in court...b) where the detention is necessary for the protection or safety of the public...and
- (c) if the detention is necessary to maintain confidence in the administration of justice, having regard to all the circumstances, including (i) the apparent strength of the prosecution's case, (ii) the gravity of the offence, (iii) the circumstances surrounding the commission of the offence...and (iv) the fact that the accused is liable, on conviction, for a potentially lengthy term of imprisonment

The Criminal Code already takes that into account. Tenth, the bill proposes to do the following:

- (j) make it a condition that those who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents deposit their passports in order to be released

Judges can already order the deposit of passports under subsection 515(4) of the Criminal Code, and from what I am told, this happens fairly frequently. That section reads:

When making an order under subsection (2), the justice may direct the accused to comply with one or more of the following conditions specified in the order:...(f) deposit all their passports as specified in the order;

I do not want to say that the bill is pointless, but some aspects of it are clearly redundant. The Bloc Québécois will obviously be voting against Bill C-242, not because it is completely inappropriate, but because we believe that we must be very careful about reversing the burden of proof and calling into question the presumption of innocence. Although we believe that some reforms need to be made to the Criminal Code, we do not think that this bill is the best way of going about that. Before I close, I would just like to point out two things.

First, there is the issue of judicial discretion. People need to trust the justice system and they need to trust judges. Of course, mistakes happen. Of course, sometimes, things go too far. Of course, sometimes judges make headline-worthy mistakes. However, for the most part, judges are the ones who see all the evidence and they are best able to make these decisions, and in most cases, the system works relatively well.

Then there is the issue of judicial resources. As I said earlier, restricting certain decisions to the superior courts can compromise the way the legal system operates. There is an issue with court resources. There are also issues with the appointment of judges, the number of judges, access to justice and the appointment of clerks. Resources are needed. For years, the Bloc Québécois—especially my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, who has repeatedly raised the issue—has called for more resources to be transferred to the provinces, which are responsible for enforcing the Criminal Code. It is easy for us to pass legislation in the House, but provinces have to enforce it. Again, I think the federal Parliament should acknowledge this fact and ensure that while the House debates possible amendments to the Criminal Code, resources are transferred to the provinces as soon as possible so that these additional resources can be used to enforce existing legislation more swiftly, which would strengthen public confidence in the system.

• (1120)

[English]

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a great honour to rise in the chamber and to speak on behalf of my constituents, the good people of Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna. Crime is one of the most serious concerns facing my riding today, with Kelowna also represented by a Liberal member, sadly becoming ground zero for the consequences of failed Liberal bail policies.

Before I speak directly to the jail not bail act, I think it is important to remind the House how we got to this place. In 2018, for purely ideological reasons, the former Trudeau Liberal government passed Bill C-75, amending the Criminal Code and fundamentally reshaping Canada's bail system. Although there were several changes, the guiding principle was very clear: Release should be the default position at the earliest opportunity and on the least onerous conditions possible. In that decision lies the heart of what Canadians now recognize as a catch-and-release justice system.

The results have been devastating. Between 2015 and 2022, violent crimes increased dramatically. The number of murders rose, gang-related homicides surged and violent gun crime more than doubled. These are not abstract statistics I speak of. They represent real victims, real families and real communities, our communities, paying the price. It became so serious that every provincial premier, regardless of their political stripe, jointly wrote to the federal government, demanding bail reform. That alone should have been a wake-up call to the seriousness of the problem, yet here we are in 2026 still debating how to clean up a mess that was created eight years ago by the former Liberal majority government.

Last week in Kelowna, a prolific career criminal, someone who had 67 criminal convictions, was once again released on bail. Can any member of the House guess what happened next? We all know the answer: This individual was released back into the very community he has repeatedly victimized, despite an extensive record that clearly demonstrated a pattern of reoffending. The situation became so serious that the RCMP took the unprecedented step of issuing a public warning upon his release. This is not normal. This is not normal policing. This is what happens when law enforcement is forced to manage risk created by bad legislation.

Out of respect for families affected by violent crime, I will not be retelling individual stories in this debate. We all have these stories. We all know the damage that has been done to our communities over and over, and the real damage to families and their lives.

I do want to just take a moment to acknowledge the terrific work of my colleague the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola and the families, particularly in Kelowna, whose advocacy has given rise to what we now know as Bailey's law. This brings me to the legislation before us today.

Before I go further, I should say that I thank the member for Oxford for his leadership on this issue and for bringing forward the jail not bail legislation, which squarely puts public safety back at the centre of bail decision. I thank the member for his contributions. I thank him for the time he spends away from his family, educating Canadians on the problems created by the previous government, and for the solutions being proposed by him as a member of Parliament, a Conservative member who believes strongly that this country and our streets can be safe again.

The legislation reflects the concerns being raised in our communities by police and by provincial leaders across the country, and it puts forward a clear, principled alternative to the status quo. Canadians have heard a lot about government attempts to fix bail laws, including Bill C-14. While some amendments are welcome and have been pushed by our caucus as supportable, I want to acknowledge that on this bill, we have tried to work in good faith with the government. Despite Bill C-14's solutions, the fundamental problem remains untouched, and that is the principle of restraint. It still exists.

● (1125)

The principle, enshrined by the Liberal majority in 2017, continues to prioritize release over detention, even for repeat and violent offenders. It is the philosophical core of catch-and-release, and it is precisely why incremental changes since that time, whether they be Bill C-48 in the previous Parliament or Bill C-14 in the current Parliament, will not fix the problem. That is why the jail not bail act is necessary. Unlike Liberal half measures, the jail not bail act would confront the problem head-on.

First, it would repeal and replace the Liberal principle of restraint, making public safety the primary consideration in bail decisions, not an afterthought and not one factor among many but the guiding principle that judges must take into consideration.

Second, it would introduce a new major offences category, applying reverse onus bail to the most serious crimes: firearms offences, sexual assault, kidnapping, human trafficking, home invasion, robbery, extortion, arson and serious assaults. These are crimes where the burden should rest squarely on the accused to justify their release.

Third, the jail not bail act would strengthen bail decisions by requiring judges to consider the accused's full criminal history, not just the offence that is immediately before the court. It would also prevent individuals convicted of a major offence within the last 10 years who are already out on bail and who are charged again from being released yet again. Importantly, it would toughen the legal standard itself, replacing the vague threshold of substantial likelihood with a more realistic and protective test of what is reasonably foreseeable.

The bill would also close loopholes by prohibiting anyone with an indictable conviction from acting as a guarantor. Someone who

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has done a crime should not be able to be a guarantor for another. This would require meaningful enforcement of guarantor responsibilities. The bill would also require non-residents to surrender passports where appropriate.

These are not radical ideas. They are common-sense protections that put victims and our communities ahead of repeat offenders.

Recently I met with the City of Kelowna, along with the member for Oxford and the member for Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, to discuss this issue. Representatives presented documents in which their executive summary stated very clearly that federal bail reforms have prioritized release over detention, even for chronic offenders. Their conclusion was clear: Kelowna supports presumptive detention and stricter bail conditions for chronic offenders.

I want to say that I stand with the City of Kelowna on these points, and I believe that most Canadians do. In fact, we held a town hall to discuss how we can stop crime in our neighbourhoods. We visited community leaders like those from the Uptown Rutland Business Association. We walked the streets with them to hear their concerns about criminality and public disorder. It became abundantly clear at our town hall that citizens in places like Kelowna and throughout the Central Okanagan are fed up. They want to know that when police charge and when people are prosecuted, people are held accountable and not simply released, only to harm families and communities again and again.

The jail not bail act would answer that question by doing what the government has refused to do: put public safety first, clearly, consistently and without apology backing up our RCMP officers, who work so hard to stop the crime, only to have those individuals released, while they are stuck with the paperwork and are arguing for more resources to deal with them.

I want to conclude by acknowledging the many members on all sides of the House who care about justice and public safety. I respect the work that the member for Oxford has done on the legislation, and I ask that all hon. members support the jail not bail act.

Private Members' Business

● (1130)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to talk about the issues of crime and safety in our communities. I thought the parliamentary secretary who spoke prior to me spoke exceptionally well about why what is being proposed is, in fact, not necessarily to the benefit of public safety.

However, I will give the Conservatives credit to the extent that they can encapsulate an issue, turn it into a bumper sticker and ultimately make money on it through social media and spreading what I would suggest is misinformation. They are using it as a fundraising tool. I give them full credit. They are really good at doing that when it comes to the crime file.

What about the reality of it? The member who spoke before me talked about public safety. Let there be absolutely no doubt whatsoever in anyone's mind that the Government of Canada, every Liberal member of Parliament, understands the issue of community safety. We all want our communities to be safe and for people to feel safe in the communities in which they live. We want people to realize that there are consequences to crime. If someone commits a crime, there will be a consequence.

We have a system in Canada that ensures a high sense of co-operation between the different levels of government. The Conservatives have brought forward legislation. If there were a question and answer period for the presentations being made today, I would have asked to what degree have the Conservatives gained the support of the different premiers, mayors and councillors in bringing forward this particular legislation. To what degree are they looking at the judicial system as something that is independent from government? I think these are valid questions, and I believe the Conservatives need to be truthful and open with Canadians.

The federal government has never used the notwithstanding clause of the Constitution. If someone were to listen to what the speakers from the Conservative Party are saying, they would begin to believe that it is the Conservatives' ace in the hole and that they would have absolutely no reservations in using it. No matter what legislation the Conservatives bring forward, even if it were to be ruled as being unconstitutional and against the charter, the charter that provides rights to every Canadian, the Conservatives would be very comfortable overriding those rights.

At the end of the day, the Conservatives have made it very clear that, under their current leadership, there is no reservation whatsoever. They are saying that they would use the notwithstanding clause to get what they want because what they want is not necessarily in the public's best interest. It is to satisfy the far right.

The last Conservative member said, "put public safety first". That is exactly what the government has done. If we were to contrast the bumper sticker bills on crime provided by the Conservatives, we would see that this bill has a lot of similarities with Bill C-14. It deals with issues such as the principle of restraint. First and foremost, it deals with the issue of public safety. When we look at Bill C-14, we will find that it has virtually unanimous support coming from all regions of the country. I should not say "unanimous", but we are getting close to it.

● (1135)

Every premier, law enforcement agencies and many stakeholders have recognized that Bill C-14 is the way to go. There are 80 targeted reforms within it, many of which have been incorporated into Bill C-242, the bill we are debating today. That is a substantial change.

I remember standing in this very same spot, back in November and December, challenging the Conservative Party to pass Bill C-14. It was the only political entity in the country back then that wanted to postpone its passage. All one needs to do is reflect on the amount of filibustering the Conservatives were doing back then. No matter how much we shamed them, they did not respond to the public interest.

The principle of restraint does not mean an automatic release. Public safety has been and will continue to be taken into consideration before release. Bill C-14 would help to address that. It would provide a bit more detail on that issue. The Conservatives believe that they would ultimately have control, through the notwithstanding clause, to dictate what judges hand out. I think that is a very dangerous path.

That is why I challenge members of the Conservative party who will be speaking, particularly the mover of the legislation, to give a clear indication of which premiers are supporting the legislation they are proposing. What major city mayors, or mayors in general, are in support of this legislation, Bill C-242? I can say that the New Democrats, the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives, even the Saskatchewan Party, see the true value of legitimate bail reform, something the Prime Minister committed to for Canadians in the last federal election. We understand the need for bail reform. We do not question that. Where we differ is that we have done our homework on the issue, and our first priority is the people of Canada and providing good, sound public policy for the different stakeholders who are lining up in support of Bill C-14, which is currently at the Senate. Hopefully, it will be out of the Senate soon so we can implement it into law.

The good news is that the government has not just ended this with Bill C-14. There is also other substantial legislation to deal with things, such as femicide. I think of Bill C-16 and the reinstatement of mandatory minimums. These are the types of things that are before the House.

Under the new Prime Minister and new government, which were elected less than a year ago, we have brought forward a suite of legislative amendments to do what the last member of the Conservative Party said, which was to put public safety first. That is what every member of the Liberal caucus strives to do through supporting substantial legislation, in consultation, that would not be an assault against the judicial system. When I say the judicial system, I am talking about stakeholders, first ministers, municipalities, law enforcement agencies and so much more.

An hon. member: What about victims?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, of course there are the victims. That is who we are talking about. They are our primary motivation.

I appreciate the heckle, but at the end of the day—

• (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): We have to move on.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge has the floor.

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-242, the jail not bail act, at second reading. It was put forward by my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Oxford, and I am proud to have seconded the legislation.

I just listened to the Liberal government's narrative of our perspective on crime, and it is an alternative universe. This bill, the jail not bail act, was announced in Woodbridge last September, in my riding, where the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. member from Oxford and I, along with other colleagues, were joined by the families of victims. The members of these families were crying in our arms. They had felt the pain of a failed Liberal bail system and the constant consequences of inaction.

The location of this announcement was not a coincidence. Woodbridge was chosen because the people who live there know this problem first-hand. They do not live in the abstract where politicians debate theories of justice. They live in the real world, the here and now, and they live with the consequences of the broken bail system and constant Liberal inaction.

I want to start in Vaughan because I feel similar to what the member for Kelowna is feeling. Vaughan feels like ground zero to many in our community for the issue of crime in this country. Now, according to York Regional Police, in the latest full-year report on crime statistics for 2024, my community recorded 16,407 criminal offences, the highest of any municipality in York region. We recorded 749 break and enters, 1,996 assaults, 274 reported sexual violations and 167 robberies. All of this was in a single year.

The stats highlight the numbers; however, there is a reality that members of the House need to realize. The reality is that, just last week, in the early hours of March 17, armed suspects forced their way into a home on Carrville Woods Circle in Vaughan. The homeowner, to protect his family, discharged a legally owned firearm. Two suspects are still at large. The family at home did nothing wrong. They had no choice, and they had no warning.

Some weeks before that, a man was shot dead outside a business at Weston Road and Rowntree Dairy Road in the middle of the afternoon. In February, a Thornhill residence was struck by gunfire. On another evening, shots were fired at a home on Allison Ann Way. In the early hours of a cold January morning, a man was shot near Martin Grove Road. A gun was seized after a commercial break-in at a Vaughan business. Another investigation linked one suspect to nine separate break and enters across Vaughan and Markham. This is what daily life has become in my riding.

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When I look at the reality and at what our bill system has been doing, that connection is not hard to find. Since the Liberals took office in 2015, violent crime in Canada is up by 55%, firearm offences are up 130%, extortion is up 330%, sexual assaults are up 76% and homicides are up 29%. These are Statistics Canada figures. They reflect a decade of policy choices that constantly prioritize the rights of the accused over the safety of the community.

In 2019, Bill C-75, the Liberals inserted what is called the “Principle of restraint” to the Criminal Code. That principle directs judges and justices of the peace to release the accused at the earliest opportunity under the least restrictive conditions. My colleague from Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, a former Crown attorney, explained precisely what that means in practice, which is that it does not matter how serious the charge, how long the criminal record or how many times the accused has already breached a bail order, the law tells the court that it has to let them go.

Then in 2022, Bill C-5 repealed mandatory minimum sentences for serious firearms and violent crimes, as well as extended the availability of conditional sentences, house arrest, for offences that most Canadians would expect to end in imprisonment. The deterrent effect of the justice system was weakened at both ends, at the point of bail and again at the point of sentencing.

The Liberals have since introduced Bill C-14 and have framed it as bail reform. I want to be fair. It is better than what exists today. Conservatives worked on that committee to strengthen the bill wherever we could. We secured tighter surety rules, provisions for repeat violent offenders who re-offend on release and annual reporting requirements.

• (1145)

However, when we pushed for public safety to become the primary governing principle, moved to eliminate house arrest for major crimes and sought mandatory consecutive sentences for repeat human traffickers, the Liberals voted against every one of those amendments. Of course, the fundamental problem with Liberal bail is that the principle of restraint would still remain. It would be modified at the edges, but it would still there, telling the courts to default towards release. The culture of prioritizing release is perpetual in our justice system, and the Liberal bail bill, Bill C-14, would do nothing to address this.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-242, the jail not bail act, starts from a different premise entirely. It would remove the principle of restraint and replace it with a clear direction that public and community safety is the primary consideration for the justice system. It would change what judges would be asked to weigh first when someone stands before them: public safety over early release.

The bill would create a major offence category covering some of the most serious crimes we see in communities like Vaughan: firearm offences, sexual offences, kidnapping, human trafficking, home invasions, robbery, extortion and arson. For anyone charged with one of these offences, the bill would establish a presumption of detention. For repeat violent offenders, the bill would heighten the risk standards. Today, courts ask whether there is a substantial likelihood that an offender would reoffend. This bill would change that to "reasonable foreseeability", meaning whether a reasonable person looking at an accused's full criminal history, record of breaching orders and pattern of how they have moved through the system would conclude that their risk of reoffending is real.

Bill C-242 would also close gaps in our system. For example, it would bar anyone convicted of an indictable offence from serving as a guarantor. It is difficult to believe that this needs to be legislated at all, but right now in this country, someone who is an organized crime member can legally vouch for another person in bail proceedings. That would end under our bill. The bill would also require non-resident accused persons to surrender their passports.

The difference between the Liberal bill and the one before us today is that what the Liberals propose and what we are proposing is a matter of effective execution and practicality. Liberal bail reform would keep the principle of restraint. Our Conservative bill would repeal it. The Liberals want to encourage courts to consider an accused person's history. The jail not bail act would make that consideration mandatory. The Liberals do not touch surety eligibility or passport surrender. Our Conservative approach would address both. The differences are clear. The Liberals still default to release, and the Conservatives start from a principle that public safety must be the key consideration of the justice system.

The Liberals have suggested that Bill C-242 would raise constitutional concerns. It would not. In the *Crown v. Lloyd* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that mandatory minimum penalties need to be narrow and targeted. The measures introduced in the jail not bail act are targeted and proportionate measures directed at a defined category of repeat violent offenders who are before the courts under serious charges. I am very confident it would be charter-compliant. I would also observe that charter compliance cuts both ways. The charter protects the rights of law-abiding Canadians and victims too, not just those who are charged with harming them. I challenge my Liberal colleagues to remember this position.

The Bloc members have also raised concerns that more detention would strain prison capacity. We agree that we must modernize our justice system, but it is important to understand that the data do not support the worry over prison capacity. As my colleague from Oxford rightly pointed out, this issue is about repeat offenders. In Kelowna, 15 individuals committed 1,500 crimes in a single year. In Vancouver, 40 people, in one year, were arrested 6,000 times. The chronic high-volume offenders this bill targets are not filling prisons and leaving. They are cycling through the system repeated-

ly, generating arrest after arrest, hearing after hearing and breach after breach.

When this legislation was announced, it was informed by direct consultation with police chiefs, police associations, mayors, victim advocates and families of people killed by repeat offenders who should have never been free in the first place, but under Liberal bail law they were. I urge every member to support this bill at second reading.

• (1150)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I offer the hon. member for Oxford five minutes for his right of reply.

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians we are entrusted with something special: the duty to do what is right, not what is easy. What is right is very clear. It is right to build a criminal justice system that protects Canadians and protects the most vulnerable, that listens to the stories of victims and that recognizes the profound impact that every life lost and every family shattered truly carries.

Behind every crime stat there is a name, a face and a family that will never be the same. I have met with those families. They are parents who will never see their child again. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents and communities are now divided into before and after, all because a repeat violent offender was released in their communities over and over again. The stories stay with me: the heartbreak, the tears and the silence when we have no other words left to share with them.

We must ask ourselves how many more headlines we have to read, how many more victims will have to suffer and how many more families have to be broken before we finally take serious action in this chamber. Victims are feeling like they are the ones living on house arrest, looking over their shoulders and changing their routines, all while the criminals walk in and out of jail scot-free. Victims who have had their lives permanently changed are the ones facing life sentences. It is not the criminals; they are out on the streets, enjoying life.

As such, the jail not bail bill, which we consulted on right across this country, has one guiding principle. It is that repeat violent offenders, that small class of folks who terrorize our communities, should not be released on our streets. The bill is about restoring balance in our system. It is about restoring deterrence. The Liberals can heckle me all they want. They can sit here and heckle all they want. They have been doing that for a long time, but the bill is about restoring trust in our criminal justice system when far too many Canadians have lost faith in it.

My colleagues and I have travelled the country, coast to coast to coast. We have had over two dozen town halls. We have met with thousands of Canadians, families, victims and law enforcement. We have tens of thousands of signatures on petitions. The message we hear is very clear. It is that Canadians are terrified. They are fed up. They have anxiety. Sadly, they are hurting, but despite that pain, they still have hope that we can make the right call in this chamber and put forward solid policy ideas that could restore safe streets in our country yet again.

That is why my bill offers over a dozen clear, concrete solutions to the criminal justice system that would prioritize public safety, that would put the rights of victims first for a change and that would make our communities the thriving communities we used to have. As such, I encourage all members, with the vote coming up on Wednesday, to send a clear message to criminals that enough is enough, but also a clearer message to victims that we see them, we hear them and we stand with them.

On this side of the House, Conservatives are united. We are united in fighting for safe streets. To those Canadians watching at home, they should not lose faith or give up, but hold on, because it is in the darkest chapters we have the brightest lights shining. We will stand with the victims. We will stand with law enforcement. We will stand with every single Canadian right across this country, and we will put the rights of victims first because we know they are worth fighting for.

• (1155)

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 invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Arpan Khanna: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 25, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): This sitting is now suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:56 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

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COMBATTING HATE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places), as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

• (1200)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-9.

Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motion No. 1 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC) moved:

That Bill C-9 be amended by deleting the short title.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in this great House to speak to the great residents of my riding.

I rise today to speak yet once again to Bill C-9. It is a bill that has many Canadians across all faith communities deeply concerned, and for good reason. The bill was originally presented as a measure to protect places of worship, which is something every member of the House should support. Conservatives certainly do.

However, this is not the bill before us today, because in the middle of the legislative process, the Liberal government made a deliberate political decision to fundamentally change its own legislation. At the last minute, the Liberals supported an amendment to remove a long-standing religious defence from the Criminal Code. This is a defence, I might add, that has been in the code for over 50 years. They did so, regrettably and shamelessly, without consulting the faith communities directly impacted. They did so without hearing from civil liberty experts. They did so without calling one witness. They did so without allowing Parliament the time to fully study the consequences of such a significant legal change.

When those concerns were raised by religious leaders, legal experts and members of the House, the government members did not pause. They did not engage. Instead, they chose to shut down debate and force the bill through. This is why we are here today.

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What makes this even more striking is that the very defence they are now trying to remove was originally put in place by their own party under Pierre Trudeau, as part of a careful and deliberate balance in Canadian law.

This religious defence was originally introduced in 1970 under the Trudeau Liberal government as part of Bill C-3. The bill created Canada's modern hate propaganda provisions. At the time, Parliament deliberately included several statutory defences, including truth, good-faith religious expression based on religious texts, public interest and lack of intent. These protections ensured that good-faith religious discussion and theological debate would never be criminalized while still addressing hate propaganda.

This defence was part of the original legislative balance when Canada created its very own hate speech laws. Removing it would be a profound shift in Canadian criminal law, one that threatens to upset the careful balance between protecting Canadians from harm and protecting their fundamental freedoms.

Parliament has occasionally removed or narrowed statutory defences, but these changes occur rarely and only with serious scrutiny. For example, in 1983, the Trudeau government removed a marital exemption that had prevented husbands from being charged with rape. This was a good move. In 1995, Parliament restricted the extreme intoxication defence following the Supreme Court's decision in *Regina v. Daviault*. This was another good move. In 2015, the Harper government narrowed the provocation defence to prevent misuse in honour killing cases, for a change that was much needed.

Changes to statutory defences are major legal decisions that occur infrequently and only after careful and serious debate, yet the Liberal government now wants to rush through the removal of a 50-year-old defence while simultaneously shutting down all debate.

The removal of the religious defence occurred without meaningful stakeholder consultation. Religious communities across all faiths and backgrounds have raised concerns. Civil liberty organizations have raised concerns. Canadians did not ask for this amendment. Faith communities did not request this change. This was solely a political decision by the Liberal government, not a response to any demand from Canadians or stakeholders.

● (1205)

This amendment was not driven by Canadians, requested by faith communities or the result of calls from civil liberty organizations. In fact, the opposite is true. We have heard directly from Canadians across this country, including faith leaders, community organizations and civil liberty groups, who are deeply concerned about the direction the government is taking.

Hundreds of organizations have spoken out against Bill C-9, most notably about the removal of the religious defence. Over 350 Muslim community organizations have warned that Bill C-9, as currently drafted, would present serious harms to the civil liberties of all Canadian Muslims. They specifically pointed to the removal of the good-faith religious defence and warned that it would send a chilling effect through religious communities. More than 500 churches and Christian organizations have called on Parliament to restore explicit protections for the good-faith expression of sincerely held religious beliefs within the Criminal Code. In the greater

Toronto area, 44 rabbis issued an open letter to the government, warning that removing this defence could expose faith leaders, educators and religious individuals to potential criminal liability simply for reading, teaching or discussing passages from religious texts.

This is not a narrow concern coming from one group or one perspective. We have been speaking to faith communities across this country, and there is a clear and broad consensus that this defence must be maintained. I am sure that every member of the Liberal government and party have heard loud and clear the opposition in their own communities. Despite all of this push-back, the government has chosen to double down and not listen.

We even proposed a simple and responsible solution of splitting Bill C-9. It has been done in the past when we have taken out a poisonous pill. We could immediately pass the provisions dealing with protection of places of worship, protection of cultural centres and offences dealing with obstruction and intimidation, and then study squarely the removal of the religious defence. This approach would have allowed protections for religious communities to pass immediately, yet the government refused and instead chose to ram through its controversial amendment.

The Liberals now claim that the Conservatives are obstructing, but the reality is the opposite. Committee work was already under way before the backroom deal was brokered by the justice minister and the Bloc Québécois. Amendments were being debated, and a path existed to pass protections for places of worship immediately. Instead of working with Parliament, the government chose to shut down debate and ram the bill through Parliament. The Liberals are now censoring debate on their very own censorship bill.

The Criminal Code is the most serious law Parliament writes. It governs the most serious offences and carries the most serious consequences for Canadians. Changes to it must be approached with care, scrutiny and full parliamentary debate.

Bill C-9 now contains a controversial amendment that would remove a 50-year-old statutory defence, which was originally brought forth by a Liberal government, to balance the rights to protect Canadians from hate while still safeguarding legitimate expression of religious belief. Instead of allowing Parliament to fully examine that change and allowing members of the House to debate the consequences, the Liberals have chosen to ram the amendment through to silence the debate. They even told the opposition to "put up or shut up". Now they are shutting down debate altogether.

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This is not how responsible criminal law is made or how democratic institutions are supposed to function, and it is certainly not how Parliament should be asked to amend the code. Canadians expect their Parliament to debate serious legal changes openly and transparently, legislation to be studied carefully and representatives to be allowed to do their job.

Conservatives will always stand on the side of freedom of religion and freedom of expression in the country. We will not accept a government that shuts down debate to avoid accountability. We will defend open debate, proper scrutiny of the code and the fundamental principle that Parliament must never be silenced when it comes to laws that govern Canadians.

• (1210)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member said that we are trying to push or rush things through, but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that the misinformation constantly being pumped out of the Conservative caucus is trying to create an impression that there would be changes in our mosques, in our churches and so forth. The misleading information coming from the Conservative Party is actually quite shameful.

My question for the member opposite is this: Why does the Conservative Party continue to spread information that is just not true? The member knows full well that there would not be any impact on the services being provided in our religious facilities today.

Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, what an absolutely ridiculous preamble and a ridiculous question. It is the same approach the Liberal government took for the invocation of the Emergencies Act. The Liberals said to Canadians, “You have nothing to worry about. Your charter rights are temporarily suspended, but the balance of those charter rights will be upheld.” Now we have had two decisions from the Federal Court, and the Liberals waited until the very last day to file their appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. Canadians do not believe a word they have to say on not having to worry about any infringement on freedom of expression or freedom of religion. They cannot be trusted.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague say in his speech that, with the Bloc Québécois's support, the government was preventing or stifling the debate on that. The Conservatives filibustered nine meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, thereby preventing constructive debate on this sensitive issue. It is true that the Conservatives have been spreading somewhat distorted information to their base, perhaps to scare them about what Bill C-9 might do. Every time I have spoken in person with people who are concerned about this bill, they leave the conversation completely reassured about the impact, or lack thereof, it would have on their religious practices.

I would like my colleague's thoughts on this. Does he not think that if there had been an opportunity for discussion in committee, we could have made progress on some of the potentially worthwhile points being raised by the Conservatives that might have improved the bill?

[*English*]

Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. That is the problem. The government chose not to call any evidence whatsoever to support the Bloc amendment that would remove this 56-year-old religious defence. We asked for more meetings, something that was denied by the Liberal Party. In fact, it was even denied by the member from the Bloc Québécois who sits on the justice committee. We asked for a proper and vigorous study on this defence. We were turned down.

We could have focused on the real issues that Canadians are facing, such as the rising crime levels based on 11 years of a soft-on-crime agenda. We wanted to get to Bill C-14. In fact, we raised the issue before Christmas on 16 occasions. The government chose, every time, to stifle our ability to prioritize community safety instead of going after—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Long Range Mountains.

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has deep knowledge on this issue. One thing I often hear from constituents is about an attack on faith organizations by the Liberal government, and its response is, “Just trust us.”

I am wondering if my colleague would like to speak to that and give a bit of context about why constituents may feel this way based on previous decisions made by the government.

Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely correct. As I indicated in my speech, I am sure that the Liberal Party is a deeply divided caucus when it comes to Bill C-9.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, to the people who are heckling me now and to the member for Winnipeg North, we heard from people from Winnipeg, we heard from faith leaders in Winnipeg, and they are absolutely disgusted with the antics of the Liberal government in choosing to ram through a piece of legislation without proper consideration or proper debate. This was for political reasons, not through evidentiary issues or proper debate in the House of Commons. It is disgusting.

• (1215)

Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade and to the Secretary of State (International Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am standing here as the member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre, which is a great honour that the good people of my community have given me.

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I am very much looking forward to speaking again on Bill C-9, which is a very important piece of legislation. It emanates from a platform commitment that my party, the Liberal Party of Canada, made in the last election after consulting many groups around the country about the importance of having strong anti-hate legislation so that all members of our respective communities feel safe.

I was really proud when this was part of our campaign platform. I am even prouder that it was then converted into a piece of legislation and that we have come to this stage, very close to hopefully passing it through this House and then off to the other place. The context of this legislation is extremely important. We hear about this often from our communities and it has been debated in this House. There has been a very significant rise in hate crimes in our country, particularly when it comes to anti-Semitism. In the last two years, we have seen a very dramatic rise in anti-Semitic acts, not to mention within the Muslim community. The data confirms that there has been rise in Islamophobia, and there are other groups that also have faced hate.

This has led to the question of making sure that we have strengthened provisions within the Criminal Code so that we can deal with this odious hate that is spreading in our communities, especially as it relates to anti-Semitism and, of course, Islamophobia.

I will very quickly share some data with the House. In 2023, there were 4,777 reported incidents of hate, which marked a 32% rise from 2022 to 2023 in hate incidents. This was the third consecutive sharp increase in four years, with the total number of hate crimes more than doubling, to around 145%, since 2019. All this is extremely important, and it provides the necessary context by which we need to bring this legislation.

Just debating it and just issuing statements saying that hate has no space in our country is not sufficient anymore. I have heard that from my community members, especially from the Jewish community here in Ottawa Centre. They have implored the government and all members of this House, including in the opposition, to pass Bill C-9 as quickly as possible so that we can strengthen those positions.

As my colleague from Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations was saying, he is a former prosecutor, so he knows the application of law really well. I have had the honour of serving as the attorney general in this province as well, and I have had to deal with hate crime-related offences and charges. I do bring some experience to the context of why this important piece of legislation is so necessary.

The bill, is targeted, presenting a suite of Criminal Code reforms to protect safe access to community spaces. It denounces hate-motivated crimes. It clarifies the meaning of hatred. It would criminalize the wilful promotion of hatred by publicly displaying hate or terrorism symbols. These are some really important aspects of the bill. If I had to provide a summary, there are five important pillars to this bill that I want to articulate for the benefit of all members.

The first pillar, and the most important aspect of the bill, is the proposal to create a new obstruction offence. The bill would create a new offence that would prohibit blocking or interfering with lawful access to a building primarily used for religious worship, or by

an identifiable group, such as a community centre, school or seniors' residence. An example would be a group of people forming a chain in front of a synagogue, for example, or lighting a fire at the entrance of a school to stop people from entering.

● (1220)

The second pillar that is also important is the creation of a new intimidation offence. This bill would create a new offence to prohibit behaviour meant to intimidate, threaten or scare people from entering a building primarily used for religious worship or by an identifiable group such as community centres, against schools or seniors' residences. An example would be masked individuals staring down worshippers outside a mosque or shouting threats at parents dropping their children at a religious school.

The third pillar of this bill proposes a new stand-alone hate crime offence, and it is extremely important. This stand-alone hate crime offence means that when someone commits any crime because of hatred towards a specific group, such as one based on race, religion, sex, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, that hate is treated as part of the offence itself, not just something considered later at sentencing. In other words, the law would formally recognize the crime as a hate crime from the outset, relying on the existing legal definition of hatred, which is also codified in this bill. I will come to that in a moment.

What does this mean? For example, if someone assaults another person because of their religion or sexual orientation, that assault would be treated differently from a regular assault and could lead to a tougher penalty to clearly denounce crimes committed against people because of who they are.

The fourth pillar, as I mentioned earlier, is the codification of the definition of hatred. Believe it or not, we do not have a definition of hatred in our Criminal Code. We have guidance from the Supreme Court of Canada. What we have done in this instance is we have taken the definition from the Supreme Court of Canada and are now codifying it in the Criminal Code. Importantly, hatred is being defined as an "emotion of an intense and extreme nature that is clearly associated with vilification and detestation."

Lastly, the fifth pillar proposes a new prohibition on the display of certain symbols. The bill contemplates the existing offence of wilful promotion of hatred by recognizing a modern form of expression, which is the public display of hate and terrorist symbols. When someone displays these symbols with the intent to wilfully promote hatred, beyond just mere display, it becomes a distinct offence. There are many examples of protests taking place where somebody is displaying the Nazi *hakenkreuz* or the Nazi double *Sig-Rune*. These are hateful symbols that harken back to the Holocaust and the senseless murder of six million Jews. As well, symbols associated with terrorist entities listed under the Criminal Code, such as the Proud Boys or al Qaeda, will be covered under this.

We may hear from the opposition that this bill is about one small issue, but this is an extensive piece of legislation that covers so many things. This bill has gone through 30-plus hours of study. More than 35 witnesses, including community organizations, legal experts and faith leaders, have contributed to this bill. What we see from the opposition is obstruction, which is regretful. In my view, the end result is that this is a more thoughtful bill.

Changes have been made to this bill that make it even better and stronger. An example is the removal of the “religious defence” that was added in 1970 before the charter. Now, we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We have religious protection within the charter. We do not need a stand-alone defence. Regardless, there is a better “for greater certainty” clause included in it. The Attorney General consent piece has been reinstated. The definition of hatred has been strengthened, and there have been some changes in relation to hate symbols.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this bill. I am thankful it has come to this stage, and I am hopeful that it will pass through the House very soon, so that we can start working together, enforcing law like this and making sure that all our communities are safe for our Jewish neighbours, our Muslim neighbours and all Canadians.

• (1225)

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his thoughtful speech.

This morning, I listened to the debate from the Conservative Party talking about somehow believing our government was not standing with victims of violence and crime. This bill stands with victims of violence and crime, particularly hate crime.

How is it possible that Conservatives are not supporting this bill, which would stand with Jews who have been targeted for hate crimes, with Muslims who have been targeted for hate crimes, and with people like me, gay and lesbian people, who have been targeted with hate crimes? Is this not a victim-centred approach to actually address hate head-on?

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, the member is somebody who, by the way, wears a collar. He knows what it means to work with communities and to protect communities. We have seen so much victimization happen in the country over the last few years because of people's religious beliefs. It is incumbent upon us to provide protections for them, to make sure that people are not being victimized

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because of their faith, sexual orientation or identity. That is precisely what the bill is trying to do. It is an important piece of legislation. Let us not obstruct this any further and pass it through the House as quickly as possible.

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member opposite's speech. I picked up on something he said about the many hours of consultation around the legislation. I am wondering if he could be very specific about the witnesses who were called in relation to the contentious amendment that we are discussing here today.

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I think what we are considering here today is the entire bill, Bill C-9. I went through, in quite some detail, the five pillars of the bill, that make the bill. The Conservatives have chosen to divide our communities. They have chosen to just pick one very small aspect of the bill, as opposed to looking at its entirety, something that is supported by Canadians coast to coast to coast, something that was part of our platform, upon which many people voted for us.

We are fulfilling this commitment. There have been hours and hours of deliberation, debate not only here in the House but in committee. I am grateful that the bill is better because of that process. It is important that we pass the bill through the House, so that it can be law as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are so many issues we could have discussed in committee, so many concerns we could have addressed, had we been able to properly debate Bill C-9, which, as we all agree, deals with some very sensitive issues. Unfortunately, the Conservatives engaged in extensive filibustering. Nevertheless, we can still ask the government some questions, including, for instance, on subjects that some folks may view as violating their rights and freedoms.

The right to protest comes to mind, for example. Bill C-9 would criminalize the act of intimidating or preventing someone from accessing their place of worship. However, where do we draw the line between the legitimate right to protest—given that protesting is perfectly legal—and the feelings and experiences of folks trying to get to their place of worship who feel threatened or intimidated?

There are some grey areas that would have been worth discussing in committee, but we did not have the opportunity to do so. I would like my colleague to comment on this specific issue of access to places of worship. I would like to know what he thinks about this grey area, specifically.

Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

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This is a very important point, as to where those lines are. I think it is important to clarify that the bill is not a bubble-zone legislation. I know it is more commonly referred to as creating some sort of a bubble zone around places of worship, community centres or schools. That is not what the bill does. It does not talk about distances or exclusion zones, nor does it put any prohibition on having gatherings or holding signs on a public street. Of course, people have the right to protest. What we are talking about is obstruction or interference. What we are talking about is the intent to prevent somebody from going to their place of worship, school or community centre.

That is a very specific thing that has been addressed in the bill. The legislation would not create some sort of bubble zone. Frankly speaking, the federal government really does not have the jurisdiction. That falls more within property rights that are within the provincial space or municipal space.

I believe that there has been very thoughtful and clear deliberation in the manner in which the bill has been designed. It is on the right track.

- (1230)

[Translation]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that we are in full agreement with Bill C-9. I am pleased to see that the finish line is finally in sight. We may finally pass this bill. I was starting to doubt we would ever get this far, given how long the committee meetings were taking.

My colleague from Drummond just raised an important issue, namely access to places of worship. There is also the issue of the various insignia that may be prohibited. There were debates about that and witnesses who had things to say. We heard from some of them, but we could have heard more about where the line will be drawn and just how far the prohibitions will go in infringing on certain charter freedoms to protect others, such as freedom of religion or the freedom to live in peace and security. Where will the line be drawn? These are important questions that we looked at, but we may not have looked closely enough. We could have gone further.

Unfortunately, our committee had to deal with filibustering. The committee began its work last October and at the very start of the clause-by-clause review, it adopted the Bloc Québécois's proposal to eliminate the religious exemptions in the Criminal Code. It passed. I thought we were on the right track and that we would finish well before Christmas.

Unfortunately, things dragged on. I do not necessarily want to blame the Conservatives. I understand that they have a base that is attached to certain things and that they want to defend that position. However, this has left us at an impasse since before Christmas, and we have been dithering over this issue of the religious exemption.

We tried just about everything. We talked about it at length. In my opinion, the Conservatives sometimes presented their arguments in a rather clumsy way, to put it mildly, but they did so nonetheless. We listened to them. We kept arguing. We could not make any headway. We were in what I would call a deadlock.

There were two sides. On one side were the Conservatives and certain religious lobby groups who believed that religion should take precedence over the law. No matter what the laws of men—let us call them that—say, religious rules had to take precedence. On the other side, there was the Bloc Québécois, who said no and that the secular nature of the state is important. We often say that the Quebec state, like the Canadian state, is secular. Unfortunately, in practice, in the laws, there are remnants of non-secularism, of giving precedence to religions, and we must work to overcome these obstacles. We said that the state must be secular and that the laws must be the same for everyone. I do not want to live in a society where Buddhists have rules, Catholics have rules, Jews have rules, and Muslims have rules. That is a no. I believe that in Quebec, as in Canada, the state is secular; the laws are and must remain the same for everyone. Regardless of our religious beliefs or the languages we speak, regardless of our gender, race, or anything else, the rules must be the same for everyone.

I am quite proud that we have adopted this provision in Bill C-9. The previous section 319 had two exemptions, which came to be referred to as religious exemptions. One prohibited the promotion of hatred and the other prohibited the promotion of anti-Semitism. However, both allowed for a reasonable defence if the promotion was done in good faith based on a belief in a religious text.

The Bloc Québécois believed these provisions were antithetical. Indeed, I do not know of any case where someone can promote hatred or anti-Semitism in good faith. That does not exist, and there is a big problem if anyone thinks that that is possible. Good faith means equity. No one can promote hatred in good faith. The exemption was absurd, and it gave rise to a fair number of disjointed interpretations. Members will recall the events that occurred in Montreal two and a half years ago—I do not recall the exact date—when a preacher, Adil Charkaoui, said, among other things, that all the enemies of Gaza should be identified and eliminated. We spoke out against that, but the Crown prosecutor determined that he could not lay charges under the current law.

- (1235)

I would bet, rightly or wrongly, and I am not the only one, that if the religious exemptions in section 319 did not exist, this individual would have been tried and punished for a type of speech that nobody in either Quebec or Canada wants to hear.

I was pleased that the religious exemption was eliminated, and I still feel this way. I will be all the more proud of our Criminal Code when these anachronisms are finally removed from it. Once again, I believe that the rules should be the same for everyone. This is a major victory, which I am looking forward to celebrating once we have completed our study here and once the Senate has given its approval.

We believe that everyone in Canada should be able to practise the religion or life philosophy of their choice without any interference from the state and that the rules should be the same for everyone.

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[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the concerns the Conservatives have raised is the issue of trying to rush the legislation through. The member will know full well that it spent many hours in committee. There have been all sorts of opportunities for debate of the legislation.

Could the member give his perspective or the Bloc party's perspective in terms of the process we have had to go through to get the legislation to the point where it is today?

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, as I have often said in the House, in committee and even in private, I have a very hard time accepting filibustering.

I used to work in a sector where people try to be effective and where the challenges are enormous. I do not think that the challenges facing parliamentarians are any less significant. The challenges are significant, considering that we adopt rules that apply to the entire population.

I get extremely annoyed when I see time being wasted simply to block the passage of a law that someone may not like. I am not saying that filibustering is limited to the Conservatives. The Liberals have done it before and I am sure they will do it again. Filibustering is present in Parliament and I have learned to put up with it, but do not ask me to condone it. I find it appalling. We need to debate and pass legislation.

[*English*]

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the contribution to this discussion from the hon. member, my colleague.

I wonder if he could comment a bit on the lack of consultation with agents like those from the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada, and with Orthodox rabbis. There has been no serious consultation on this particular contentious part of the bill, and that feedback would be most informative. There has been none, not at committee or anywhere else, much against what Liberal colleagues and others have said about this.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, it is true that there are aspects we did not have time to consider. Like I said at the outset, that is regrettable but, unfortunately, it is what it is.

There is a legal maxim that delaying justice is often tantamount to denying justice. I would say it is much the same in Parliament. Delaying the passage of laws is tantamount to failing to pass them at all, which is unfortunate.

If there were fewer delaying tactics in committee, if there were less obstruction, we might have time to hear from more witnesses and experts on various issues. Unfortunately, witnesses—who are often victims—come and tell us that these situations are untenable. I fully agree with them, but that does not allow us to pass laws. After that, we hear long speeches from MPs from one party or another who will sit around the table and talk for days on end with the sole aim of preventing us from passing laws.

Yes, the result is that, at times, we do not get as much work done as we would have liked. I agree with my colleague. I invite him to discuss this with his whip.

● (1240)

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in an article in *La Presse* this weekend, Éric Ouellet, a member of the Barreau du Québec, wrote:

The fact that hate speech may be perceived as enjoying greater protection because of its religious nature undermines the credibility of the legal system.

He goes on to say:

The real systemic risk is not an overuse of prosecution, but rather the normalization of rhetoric that targets protected groups under the guise of religious legitimacy.

I would like to know if my colleague agrees that the existing religious exemption in the Criminal Code is likely to undermine the credibility of the rule of law, which is so important to Quebeckers and Canadians.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. The member for Mirabel always makes valid points. I could not agree with him more.

There was a time when that was happening in Quebec. Religion had a hold on the state. We have heard stories of situations where priests were telling families that they did not have enough children and that they had to have more. There was a lot of interference that did not make any sense. We do not want any of that today. We did everything we could to prevent that sort of thing, including removing religion from the laws of the state.

Under the Criminal Code, it is illegal to promote hatred, but if a person were to do so based on the Torah, the Koran, the Bible or any other religious text, then it is acceptable. We are saying no to that. No matter the reason, promoting hatred is unacceptable, regardless of the person's race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have before us today is a substantive piece of legislation, Bill C-9, which deals with combatting hate. This legislation was proposed by the government in the last federal election, less than a year ago. The Prime Minister and Liberal members from coast to coast to coast recognize the harm hatred is causing in our communities.

It is important to recognize that we do not tolerate anyone being made to feel afraid because of who they are, who they choose to worship or anything of that nature. Bill C-9 is substantive, positive legislation that would make a positive difference in our communities.

I am disappointed with the Conservative Party of Canada's approach to Bill C-9. I want to go into a bit of detail on that. This will be the second time now that I have quoted from the *Toronto Sun* in my political history, I suspect. It is the same article I quoted before, and I am quoting it because I think it speaks volumes to those individuals who are concerned about what Bill C-9 is proposing to do or not do. I underline the word “not”.

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This is an article that was published back on January 13. The author of this special is Joseph Neuberger. He has been a criminal lawyer for decades. That is important for us to recognize. In the article, he states:

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 real danger is allowing false claims about religious freedom to obscure the actual purpose and effect of the law, and to prevent Parliament from responding to conduct that undermines safety, dignity and social cohesion.

This is someone who supported the Conservative Party and who truly understands the hate that is out there.

The title of the article is, “Bill C-9 doesn't threaten religious freedom. It draws a necessary line”. The subtitle is, “Bill C-9 does not regulate belief, worship, sermons or religious teaching. It does not criminalize disagreement or political debate.”

Again, this was published on January 13. It reads, “Religious freedom in Canada is firmly protected by the Charter. That protection is well established and robust. Bill C-9 does not weaken it.” 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.” It continues to read, “Much of the opposition to the bill rests on a misunderstanding—or misrepresentation—of free expression and religious liberty.”

The article continues with a point that people really need to understand, which is the fact that this is not coming from a partisan who supported the government in the last election. It is coming from someone who has had to deal with this on the front line.

● (1245)

I find it unfortunate. There is so much misinformation about a substantial piece of legislation that would deal with hate crimes in a very real and tangible way. Instead of dealing with the issue, the Conservative Party has made the determination that it is in its financial and political, partisan best interests to support misinformation.

If Conservatives want to say they do not support misinformation, they should make an apology to Canadians. Planting fear in the minds of those in churches, gurdwaras, mosques, synagogues and Hindu temples and trying to give the false impression that the scripture they talk about in their places of faith is somehow going to be criminal is absolutely ridiculous, and I question the motivation of the Conservatives in doing so. Why are they doing this? One of the things I hate most about politics is seeing the types of propaganda coming from the Conservative Party.

There are many emails about this. Let me give a sampling of two. I can assure everyone that there are more. I have just not had the time to go through all of them. Here is one email that was sent to me, which says the Liberals and Bloc want to prosecute people for quoting scripture. They are trying to push laws that could criminalize passages from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and other sacred texts. This is a Conservative email that actually came to me. Here is another email. Again, it is Conservative email that came to me. It says Bill C-9 would punish Canadians for quoting scriptures that government considers politically incorrect.

These are the types of tactics we see the far right of the Conservative Party of Canada pumping out to Canadians.

The people we represent have a certain amount of trust and faith in what politicians are saying. If we have politicians in the official opposition spreading misinformation, of course there is going to be a reaction to it.

I am of Christian faith myself, and if I believed for a moment that this information was true, I would not support Bill C-9. It is just not true, and the Conservatives know it, yet they continue to support the type of misinformation that is divisive and has a substantial cost.

This legislation would protect our faith facilities. It would protect our community clubs and other gatherings where hatred and terrorism are being promoted and where individuals are being prevented from attending a facility. That is what it would do.

Bill C-9 would ensure that hate and the intentional promotion of hatred are taken into consideration in our laws. It would criminalize them, yet the Conservative Party of Canada is taking one aspect of the bill and using it to promote fear and misinformation at a substantial cost. We know that, and they cannot deny it, because of the information they have been caught circulating. They say there are some people within our faith communities who are really upset because of that aspect of it. When the official opposition is taking the position it has, it does not surprise me.

I would challenge members opposite to take a higher road on such an important issue.

● (1250)

I see my time has expired. I will leave it at that.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a few things to speak to. First of all, the government is politicizing this issue and causing a lot of division among Canadian society. Secondly, the government has lost the trust of the faith communities in Canada.

As far as what we are hearing from Canadians is concerned, I have religious institutions in the double digits in my riding of Edmonton Manning. It is a diverse riding in Canada. There are a lot of concerns. I have been hearing about this for months.

The government has flip-flopped for political reasons to work with the Bloc Québécois on this issue. It had better tell Canadians the true story and should better explain its position.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have told Canadians the true story. I have provided, in a very clear and concise way, the misinformation the Conservatives have been pumping out to Canadians, whether it is in the form of press conferences, emails, social media or letter campaigns, no doubt. I do not necessarily have a letter, but someone can stand up and tell me if I am wrong. They will be pumping out letters and all sorts of other misinformation.

It is not the government that is providing misinformation. It is today's Conservative Party of Canada. It is actually a very destructive thing to be doing. Conservatives are not helping people of faith by spreading such misinformation.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr Speaker, I do not even have the words. The member across the way is very emotional, raising his voice to the level that he is about a topic that is very divisive for Canadians. The Liberals, as my colleague from Edmonton Manning has pointed out, have done a very good job of dividing Canadians.

There are a lot of reasons why Canadians and Conservatives do not trust Liberals. We know that, but here is my question for the member across the way. The Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture is a person who sits at the cabinet table. He stated that parts of the Bible should be banned and identified as hate speech. That is why we do not trust the Liberals.

What does the member have to say to that?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, Canada has the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Within the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is an absolute—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, members should read what the charter says. It guarantees religious freedom.

When members want to talk about division, I wish they would look in the mirror. The division that is being caused today on Bill C-9 is being promoted to the nth degree by the Conservative Party of Canada. What used to be a party that had some ounce of integrity has lost it under its leadership. We see that demonstrated by the tactics it is using with Bill C-9. Whether the Conservatives like it or not, that is—

• (1255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Questions and comments, the member for Drummond.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, imagine the quality of the debates we could have had if the Conservatives had not filibustered during nine meetings of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We could have discussed a great many matters as interesting as this one.

I want to go back to the issue of disinformation and the misrepresentation of facts in which the Conservative Party engaged in order to incite anger around Bill C-9. Has my colleague from Winnipeg North had any discussions with his constituents about the fact that the bill would not really infringe on their freedom to practise their religion? I personally had a number of conversations with people in Drummond who were rightly concerned because, when people hear fearmongering like that, they call me and want to know what is going on. Obviously, I reassured them by telling them that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to practise their religion.

Has my colleague had the same type of conversation to reassure his constituents? In my case, my conversations were quite successful.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. Those residents of Winnipeg North who took the time to contact me ex-

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pressed some genuine concerns about what the government is doing and what Bill C-9 is all about. I believe those concerns were addressed. In fact, I have had not one, but two virtual town hall meetings. I can count on one hand the number of people who attended the virtual town hall meetings I had because of concerns about Bill C-9.

At the end of the day, it is about knowledge and understanding what Bill C-9 would do. Bill C-9 is a good, substantial piece of legislation that would deal with hate crime in Canada.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this has been a challenging issue, to say the least. We heard from the Liberal government as to what it claims Bill C-9 is and what it would do. Then we read the bill and looked at what the Liberals are doing and how they feel about people of faith in this country.

I think about the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and comments he has shared in the House, in which he said very clearly that he believes that there are some books of holy scripture that, in his view, are clearly hateful, so much so that he thinks prosecutors should be able to criminally charge the people who utter them, criminally charge people who read from the Bible, the Torah or the Quran.

This is very concerning to people in this country. There is a reason that more than 350 Muslim groups, more than 700 Christian groups and dozens of Orthodox Jewish leaders have called on the government to walk away, to backtrack on Bill C-9, specifically the removal of the long-standing protections for religious speech.

We listened to them. I have had the opportunity to go around the country and do the consultations the Liberal government never did with the people who would be directly affected by the bill. People feel hurt. They feel assaulted by a government that claims to be protecting those very people with this legislation. I would like to provide a couple of examples of what happens when this power goes unchecked.

We have all seen, from the United Kingdom, images, videos and stories of police knocking on people's doors over things they have posted on social media. This actually has a name in the U.K. They call it a non-crime hate incident. It is the arm of the state, weaponizing its power against people because of their opinions or because they wrote something that might be off-colour or that hurt someone's feelings. That does not mean it rose to the very high threshold of incitement, which is really what we are talking about when we talk about criminalizing hate.

We have a balance in Canada that has worked for many years. That balance was upheld in part because the Criminal Code has the religious defence, which says that someone cannot be prosecuted for wilfully promoting hate if in good faith they were expressing a religious belief or citing a religious text.

The news reported the other day that there is a priest in Iceland named Jakob Rolland who is under police investigation for expressing in a radio interview his church's view on matters of sexuality. The police are investigating him.

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There is a long-running case in Finland with respect to a member of Parliament, Päivi Räsänen, who was a cabinet minister. In Finland, cabinet ministers do not try to throw people in jail for quoting holy scripture. However, this member of Parliament has now been in court case after court case for seven years over a tweet in which she quoted the Bible and affirmed what she believed is a biblical teaching. The mechanism being used against her in Finland is very similar to what we hear from members of the Liberal Party right now, not just in the context of Bill C-9 but also in the online harms act, the legislation the Liberals have tried to pass twice in previous parliaments and have said will be coming back again.

We are here today because we have been listening. We have been listening to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. It is a body that does not often get into matters of politics, but it felt so strongly about the removal of the religious defence that it spoke out and said that this would jeopardize religious freedoms in Canada.

• (1300)

We have been listening to the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, who similarly said that he has no desire to preach hate but that he can have the freedom to preach the gospel of love only if he has the freedom to decide for himself, not have the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, the Minister of Justice, the Prime Minister and not some backbenchers in the Liberal Party who have had egregious things to say about people of faith in the past, decide. The primate, members of his church and his fellow clergy should decide.

There is the National Council of Canadian Muslims, the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Rabbinical Council of Toronto and the United Church of Canada. If we put all these groups in one room, they will disagree on so many things, but what they agree on is more important, which is that they all benefit from religious freedom. They all benefit from freedom of expression. If we do not protect religious freedom for every individual faith denomination and religious organization, we have not done our job as parliamentarians in upholding the charter values of freedom of expression and freedom of religion for all Canadians. Religious freedom for one is religious freedom for all.

I have no doubt that we are going to hear from the Liberals that this is all a load of hokey because the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of religion. I am going to give the member for Winnipeg North a bonus question, which I will answer before he even asks it. That protection does not stop a government in real time from violating rights. If he wants proof of that, he need not look further than the decision made last week by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice to appeal once again the decision that the use of the Emergencies Act was unconstitutional. The Federal Court ruled, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled, and now the Liberals are taking it all the way to the Supreme Court.

However, when Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act, he used the very same language we hear from Liberals right now to defend Bill C-9, which is that we need not worry about our charter rights' being violated, because the charter protects our rights. Well, a load of good that does. If there is four-plus years of litigation, only to, at the end, have a declaration that maybe we were right, it did not stop the violation from taking place in the first place.

In fact, even the debate we are having right now has been limited to just one single day because the Liberals did not want to hear on record the concerns I have been sharing and the concerns that have been conveyed to me by faith leaders in my riding and around the country, including Manitoba, the GTA, Newfoundland, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Many of the people who came out to our town halls were not even political. In fact, many of them said they never wanted to get involved in politics, because they believe in the idea that church and state should be separate. That is what we are actually protecting. We are protecting the church from the state. We are protecting all faith institutions from a world in which government decides which religious scriptures we can cite and which ones we cannot, and which religious beliefs are legitimate and which ones are not.

I cannot stress enough that the people of faith in this country, including the hundreds of Muslim groups and the hundreds of Christian groups, representing among them literally millions of Canadians, do not want the right to preach hate. They want the protection that the state will never weaponize the definition of hate to silence them. That is key. No one is asking for a hall pass to commit a crime under a religious pretext. One cannot rob a bank, run down the road yelling "God is good" and expect the police will not follow them, but the religious defence does protect against overzealous and politically motivated prosecutions to silence people because of a hatred and contempt for what they believe, for who they are.

As I said in my last speech on this subject, hate is real. In London, a Muslim family was killed because of its faith. Just this past week there was another church burned, the 124th in the last five years in Canada, this one in New Brunswick. We have seen the brazen anti-Semitism. Hate is real, but no community is protected by legislation that infringes on its right to believe what it wants to believe.

Bill C-9 must be defeated.

• (1305)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite actually sent me an email.

Andrew Lawton: I did?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: You did, and I will share it with you after the question.

Mr. Speaker, here is what the member said: "The Liberals and Bloc want to prosecute people for quoting scripture."

Ten minutes ago, I did a quick search on YouTube, and I googled the member's name. I do not think I can show it, but there is a picture of the member, and in big, bold letters it says on it, "arrested for quoting Scripture?"

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The member is a point person for the Conservative Party of Canada. The misinformation out there is real, and it is tangible. Does he take any responsibility for spreading this misinformation?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Before I go on, I just remind the member to direct his comments through the Chair. He is an experienced member.

The hon. member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South.

Andrew Lawton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture: “Clearly, there are situations in [religious] texts where statements are hateful.” Prosecutors should be able to “press charges”. I fail to see where the misinformation is, when a Liberal cabinet minister is on record wanting people criminally charged for quoting scriptures he disapproves of.

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has just given a fantastic, passionate speech.

The chief of the largest police service in this country says that the laws that govern hate crime already exist and that they just need to be used. Would the added legislation help this process any further, or would it make things more confusing for law enforcement officers who are out there in the middle of the country and may not know the entire context of what they are seeing?

Andrew Lawton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from just down Highway 401, not just for his question but also for his service, and I thank other law enforcement members in this country who have been very clear that the support they seek from members of Parliament is not the right to go in and arrest people for preaching religious texts. They want us to get serious about fixing Liberal bail. What is interesting is that we have an enforcement problem. There have been a number of cases across the country in which existing laws concerning people calling for violence and people inciting genocide have not been enforced.

If we have a system in which there is a huge disparity between what the law says and how it plays out, new laws are not going to solve that problem. They are only going to give us more things to point to that are not actually being done. This is so key. What the Liberals would be doing would actually be to create a tool that could be weaponized against people for their core religious beliefs, and that is not what law enforcement wants.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from a speech delivered by Imam Adil Charkaoui in Montreal on October 23, 2023. He said, “Allah, take care of these Zionist aggressors. Take care of the enemies of the people of Gaza. Identify them all, then exterminate them. And don't spare any of them.” If that is not hate speech, then I would like my Conservative colleagues to tell me what is. No charges were brought against him after that speech. It was the federal police, the RCMP, that said we should modernize the Criminal Code to ensure that we wipe out hate speech.

I would like to ask my colleague a simple question: If he wants to crack down on hate speech, why does he not agree that we should put the legislative tools in place to do so?

[*English*]

Andrew Lawton: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois and the Liberals continue to misrepresent what happened in the Adil Charkaoui case. This man should be charged, because inciting violence is already illegal. Threatening violence is already illegal. I cannot say this clearly enough: Neither of those offences is subject to the religious defence. That is a bald-faced misrepresentation of the law.

By the way, the prosecutors in Quebec did not at all cite the religious defence for their refusal to charge Mr. Charkaoui. The religious defence and the protections that apply to good-faith religious expression have nothing to do with that deplorable man in Quebec who committed a heinous criminal act that should have invited prosecution.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a profound sense of responsibility that I rise today to speak at the report stage of Bill C-9.

This bill seeks to combat hate. It is an essential bill that is urgently needed to protect Canadians. We have all observed a troubling reality across the country, namely the increase in hate-motivated crime. These acts are not abstract. These acts inflict harm, cause trauma and, above all, divide Canadian society. Just think about the attacks on synagogues in the Toronto area. Just think about the father who was assaulted in my Montreal riding because of his identity, beliefs and background. These acts are not trivial. They are an attack on who we are and on Canadian values. They are an attack against us as a society. However, in response to this urgent problem, what are we seeing? We are seeing stalling tactics, filibustering and procedural stunts that put partisan calculations above Canadians' safety.

In politics, wasting time is a luxury we cannot afford when communities are living in fear. Hate crimes are on the rise, yet the opposition is responding by contriving procedural delays and would rather post clips on YouTube than provide our constituents with meaningful protection. I have watched people rise in the House just to get sound bites and spread lies about the bill, instead of prioritizing and promoting meaningful protection for our constituents. That is why I decided to speak today.

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We need to go even further, because even the alarming figures cited by my colleagues on this side of the House do not tell the whole story. The reality is even more serious. Hate crimes are vastly under-reported. An estimated four out of five victims do not file a complaint. I repeat: four out of five victims. That means that behind every statistic, there are untold stories. Behind every statistic, there are fears that kill and, of course, invisible wounds. Those are the voices we have to answer to today. Bill C-9 as amended provides a clear, firm and responsible response. I invite everyone to read the amendments. It strengthens the tools available to law enforcement, protects our communities' public spaces, and sends a clear message that there is no place for hate in Canada.

I want to commend the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for its hard work. Thanks to its efforts, this bill is now more specific, more balanced and more respectful of our fundamental rights. Let us be quite clear: Fighting hate does not mean giving up our freedoms. On the contrary, our approach has been guided from the start by one fundamental principle: We must protect Canadians while fully upholding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and all of our fundamental rights.

That is why Bill C-9 is built on solid guarantees and high thresholds. Consider the provisions targeting certain hate or terrorist symbols, for example. These are not vague or random measures. On the contrary, they take aim at very specific symbols, Nazi symbols, symbols associated with known terrorist organizations recognized by Canada. These symbols are not harmless. They embody hate, glorify violence and are designed to intimidate. The communities concerned have clearly told us that they want protection and do not want to be taken hostage by politicians' debates ever again.

• (1315)

I would now like to address some other fundamental issues.

One of them is the requirement for Attorney General consent. I want to spend some time on this, because it is very important. This is a fundamental issue that really needs to be clarified, and it is important not to spread lies about it. This is a really important aspect because it is not merely incidental. It provides essential protection against abuse. It ensures that only legitimate prosecutions will go forward, thereby preventing any abuse or exploitation of the justice system. Once again, the committee was thorough and judicious in reinforcing this requirement.

The bill also provides a crucial clarification of the very definition of hatred. It is based on Supreme Court of Canada jurisprudence, including the Keegstra decision. Hatred is defined as an emotion of extreme intensity, a deep loathing that goes far beyond mere offence or disagreement. Let me be clear. Criticizing, debating and expressing an opinion, however vigorously, remains protected and remains a right. However, inciting hatred, dehumanizing others and calling for violence are unacceptable. These acts have no place in our democracy and no place in Canada.

The bill also introduces a major step forward: the explicit recognition of hate crimes. Hate crimes are not like other offences. Yes, they target individuals, but they also target their identity and their entire community. When a synagogue or mosque is vandalized, it is not just the building that is under attack. The perpetrator is sending

a message of fear to an entire population or group. When a person is attacked because of their religion, because of their hijab or kippah or because of their ethnic origin, it is not an isolated act. On the contrary, it is an attempt to undermine societal harmony. This bill clearly affirms that such acts will be recognized for what they are: serious attacks on Canada's social fabric.

Some have said that this is excessive. I am hearing members on the other side of the House saying that this goes too far. However, those who are living in fear do not feel the same way. They think that this bill is necessary. They think that it is crucial for their dignity and safety, for living together in harmony and upholding people's fundamental right to live without fear.

Bill C-9 also contains measures to protect access to places of worship, schools and community centres. Again, let us be very clear. The goal is not to restrict the right to peaceful protest. It is to prevent intimidation, obstruction and fear campaigns.

I served on Montreal's city council for eight years. I was the vice-chair of Montreal's public safety commission for eight years. I worked with the Montreal police for almost five years. This bill is critical for law enforcement and the police because it will allow them to take action and provide protection. I am speaking from personal experience. I know that police officers face this limitation because they do not have any power to take action.

Incidentally, municipalities are on the front lines of these realities, and they have expressed support for our bill. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has made it clear that our legislative framework needs to be strengthened to combat hate, including hate speech and hate symbols. Municipalities witness the concrete impact of these acts on social cohesion every single day.

We should listen to what they have to say. This debate should not be partisan. It is about the safety of Canadians. It is about human dignity and our country's core values. Our government is committed to taking action, to protecting Canadians and to ensuring that everyone, no matter who they are, can live freely and practise their faith without fear.

I urge all members of the House to rise to the occasion, support Bill C-9 and ensure it passes third reading because, in the face of hatred, inaction is not an option.

• (1320)

[English]

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked in his speech about needing new laws and new rules. We have already had good questions from many of my colleagues, who have spoken about how representatives of the biggest police forces in this country have already said they do not need more laws and rules to have to try to enforce. What they need is that when somebody is to be prosecuted, charges would be pressed and placed on these folks. Police officers do not need another tool like this.

I want to hear from the member here today whether, if this bill becomes law, he can guarantee that there will no longer be shootings at synagogues, shootings at Jewish schools and shootings at hospitals. There have been over 120 churches burned in the last five years. Can he guarantee that will all end? Can the member commit that all these crazy crimes, which have all been committed because of the lack of interest by the current government to do something, will end once this bill passes?

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify two points that need to be understood when asking this sort of question.

Protecting freedoms does not mean tolerating hatred. On our side of the House, we do not want to tolerate hatred. We do not want to, nor can we, tolerate violence against any place of worship. We do not want to prevent anyone from exercising their right to free speech, regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. We think it is very important to make that clear.

Once again, I would like to mention my experience with the police and public safety services in Montreal. Yes, we need this lever. Yes, we need this regulation. We must take preventive action, rather than wondering whether there will actually be shootings as a result of this regulation. We must give the police the tools they need.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion the member for Bourassa brings to this issue.

Recognizing the importance of combatting hate, which I think is one of the things that gets lost because of the misinformation the Conservative Party puts out on Bill C-9, the bill would deal with the issue of hate. It goes back to the last election when the Prime Minister was elected just under a year ago with a new government, and we had an emphasis on combatting hate. I wonder if the member would provide his thoughts on how important it is that we fulfill the commitment we made to Canadians through Bill C-9.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate something that my colleague mentioned and elaborate on it. It is important to remember that this bill does not target opinions; it targets acts of hatred and hate crimes. I will give a very simple example.

Let us remember what happened at the Quebec City mosque. The young man who opened fire on the people in that mosque had post-

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ed hate messages on social media. When the police asked him whether anyone had ever told him that that was illegal and that it was not right, he said that he had been doing it for years and that no one had ever tried to stop him. No one had ever talked to him about it. That is very important.

Horrible hate crimes and terrorist acts are born from hate that is, unfortunately, nourished by hate speech on social media. This bill seeks to destroy and eliminate this type of speech.

• (1325)

[English]

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague another question.

The largest public sector union, PSAC, has come out and said that it wants this bill not just amended but scrapped entirely. It does not support anything inside this bill. I am wondering if the member has met with PSAC and whether he is willing to take its concerns or if he would tell PSAC that it is wrong and that this bill needs to be passed.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again clarify something. The bill has been amended, and I hope that my colleagues opposite have read the amendments.

I talked about Montreal, which is a large urban centre, but I could just as easily have been talking about Toronto or any other big city. The issue is that the police need this regulatory power so that they can take preventive action, so that they can eliminate the problems, the crime and the threats against these places of worship at their source.

[English]

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to warn us today that I may reference and read from a very dangerous book, a book so dangerous that the government is moving to criminalize the very utterance of its words in public spaces, a book so dangerous that at least some Liberal members say it is full of hate, and a book so dangerous and so full of hate, the government says that it is seeking, through Bill C-9, to strip away protections that shield good-faith readings and teachings from the Bible and other holy texts Canadians read every day.

I am, of course, talking about the Bible, a book targeted by Bill C-9, like so many other holy texts that millions of Canadians read and rely on every day. What a sad irony it is that a book filled with the promise of the gospel is called hateful. It is another sad irony that just steps away from where we speak today, etched into the very rock of Centre Block, are more than two dozen scriptures from that Bible. The very motto of our country, "From sea to sea" is found in Psalms. How can a nation carved from biblical truths seek to criminalize those truths now?

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The Prime Minister has shown his fondness for some great Athenian thinkers. The first, of course, was Thucydides, whom he quoted at length in his speech at Davos. I would ask the Prime Minister to reflect on that and reflect on that great Athenian's enthusiastic support for democracy. Not only was Thucydides a realist in some manner, but he was an ardent proponent of liberty and the liberty that served as the very foundation of Athenian democracy, including the foundational idea of free expression. In Greek, it was known as *parrhesia*, meaning frank, open and fearless speech.

Before Milton, before Mill, before Madison even, before all the Enlightenment thinkers and those who came after them were the ancient ones of western culture and civilization. In his histories, the great Athenian recorded how his people enjoyed personal liberty without constant surveillance and meddling by the state yet remained engaged in public affairs through open discussion, which was essential, he said, for wise governance, for civic virtue and for a vibrant society where citizens could advise the public.

The idea of open expression is foundational to our democratic strength and became a cornerstone of western thought. One translation of Thucydides puts it this way: "We alone do good to our neighbours not upon a calculation of interest but in the confidence of freedom and in a frank and fearless spirit." Another translation puts it slightly differently: "We Athenians...instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all."

Wise action requires frank, open and fearless speech. In fact, the very prayer that the Speaker offers at the opening of Parliament pleads with the Almighty for wisdom. I hope that the Prime Minister will reflect on this as his government moves to enact a law that would potentially significantly harm and erode free expression, including the religious expressions of Canadians.

I have a comment on Bill C-9 and the proposal itself. Combatting hate is a laudable goal. Combatting hate is a goal that I share. I know that each member of the official opposition shares that goal too, one that I am sure every parliamentarian here shares. The issue is not whether we share the same goal. The issue is the means by which the Liberal government has chosen to attempt to achieve its goal.

Unfortunately, the path chosen by the government, Bill C-9, would not achieve that goal. Not only would Bill C-9 not achieve that goal of combatting hate, it would, in fact, impose harm on many of the very groups it seeks to protect. This is because, rather than working with the opposition to craft a useful bill, the Liberals instead made a Faustian bargain with the Bloc. The bargain was the removal of long-standing protections in the Criminal Code for Canadians who express, in good faith, sincerely held religious beliefs in return for the Bloc agreeing to support Bill C-9.

● (1330)

It is a dramatic divergence from where the government started with their proposal in Bill C-9. The good-faith defence has an important purpose. In the same way that our hate speech laws protect groups from hatred, the good-faith defence ensures that those protections are not wielded as a tool of hatred by those who find religious thought distasteful. Let me stress that the defence works both ways. It applies equally to expressions critiquing a religious view

as it does to expressions espousing a religious view. In other words, one can be critical of religion without being found criminally liable for hate speech.

I also want to address several misconceptions that have been playing out throughout the House. Many have suggested that the good-faith defence can be and is being used to shield otherwise hateful speech, or put another way, that religious expression is being used to cloak hateful speech. This misrepresents the content and effect of the good-faith defence.

First, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that this defence is or has been abused since it was first introduced in the 1970s. Second, threats of violence are by definition excluded from protections of free expression. It should go without saying that a threat to violence can never be made in good faith. That is a complete answer to the question of Charkaoui so often posed by my Bloc colleagues. Whether it is a preacher, a madman or the Prime Minister himself, the good-faith defence does not apply when someone calls people to action through violence.

With reason and logic failing them, the Liberal response has increasingly resorted to a form of "just trust us": Just trust us that the bill does not do what opposition members think; just trust us that the government would never harm or tread on the liberties of Canadians; and just trust us that prosecutors, courts and tribunals will protect and uphold free expression. I am sorry, but we do not trust the Liberal government. We do not trust the government because it has shown itself to be untrustworthy when it comes to defending the liberties of Canadians.

We can read the bill and see what it means. We do not trust the government because, when given the chance, the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture told Canadians that certain parts of the Bible and the Torah contain clear hatred and that he could not conceive of how parts of the Bible could be expressed in good faith. His opinion was that prosecutors should have discretion to press charges. We do not trust the Liberal government because Canadians of all creeds and of no creed at all have agreed that Bill C-9 would harm free expression.

We do not trust the Liberal government because when confronted with protesters that the Liberals found distasteful, it invoked war-like powers to persecute them, because it remains the avowed aim of this government to revoke the charitable status of pro-life organizations, and because it was the Liberal government's approach to require applicants to Canada's summer jobs program to pledge fealty to its ideas to access government services.

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Bill C-9 is not a serious response to hatred. The antidote to hatred is not censorship. The antidote to hatred is not government-approved truths. The antidote is and always has been more speech, more voices raised in truth, more ideas tested in public and more freedom to speak, to debate and to persuade. That is the bedrock of a free society. That is really the difference between us and them. On the other side, they believe in the benevolence of the state and that government can and should shield people from ideas and decide which ideas may be debated in the public square and even which people may participate. We, on the other hand, believe in people. We are not afraid of ideas. We welcome them.

In closing, there is another principle etched on the Centre Block of Parliament. It can be found on one of the south windows, the stained glass windows in Centre Block. It also comes from Thucydides: "Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have courage to defend it." It is the courage to confront this censorship and the courage to protect and defend freedom and our liberties. We have that courage here. I hope the government does too.

• (1335)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the member opposite and the other member from the Conservatives who just spoke to the legislation, I have a fairly straightforward question. What is his position in regard to the overall changes being proposed in Bill C-9? Is there anything in Bill C-9 that the member opposite or the Conservative Party supports?

Jacob Mantle: Mr. Speaker, there are several parts of Bill C-9 that we were willing to work with the government on, and I am glad to see that we did find some common ground. Putting back the Attorney General's consent to invoking prosecutions was a positive that we supported. Increasing back to the Supreme Court jurisprudence the definition of hatred was a change we supported. Unfortunately, all of these changes that could have been made, that could have been positive and that we could have worked on were entirely undermined by the government's tyrannical approach to revoking Canadians' free expression and free religious expression by removing the good-faith defence in the Criminal Code.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's 10-minute speech outlined a lot of information. It was a very dense speech when it comes to practical information regarding this bill. I was wondering if he could give us a synopsis, a really quick and brief overview, of why this bill is so horrible, why it is constricting the rights of Canadians and how he thinks we could stop that.

Jacob Mantle: Mr. Speaker, let me just start by saying it is not just my opinion that this bill is horrible. The Liberal government has unanimously gotten Canadians to oppose this bill. Christian organizations, Muslim organizations, Hindu organizations, non-religious organizations, constitutional foundations and civil liberties groups have all unanimously opposed the bill because they see the danger in opening the door to the government policing religious speech and religious text. That is a door we want to be firmly shut.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech. I gave an ex-

ample earlier, following a speech by a Conservative colleague, about how Imam Adil Charkaoui had incited hatred, notably with his speech at an event.

No charges were brought under the existing Criminal Code, and that is why the Bloc Québécois is seeking to modernize it, as suggested by the RCMP. There were no grounds for the RCMP to lay charges, even though someone had engaged in hate speech.

I would like my colleague to explain this to me in concrete terms: If a person can preach hatred under the guise of religion, and the police are telling us that they are unable to lay charges, how is it that my colleague does not agree with the idea of modernizing the Criminal Code to prevent this sort of situation?

• (1340)

[*English*]

Jacob Mantle: Mr. Speaker, I will give my colleague a genuine answer to his genuine question. As I said in my speech, calls to violence are not protected under the Criminal Code or by free expression. That was true before Bill C-9 and it will be true after Bill C-9.

I must disagree with the hon. member when he suggests a revision or an update is needed to deal with Mr. Charkaoui. That is not the case. He called for violence, which is not protected by the Criminal Code or the charter. He could have been prosecuted, and it was a decision by the police force in his province to not do so. I will remind the member there are numerous tools in the Criminal Code that could be used to address this, such as criminal harassment, mischief and causing a disturbance. There are so many tools to be used, but none were used. I suggest he ask the police force in his province why that was the case.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): We have time for a 30-second question.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, a Conservative supporter, Joseph Neuberger, wrote:

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 real danger is allowing false claims about religious freedom to obscure the actual purpose and effect of the law, and to prevent Parliament from responding to conduct that undermines safety, dignity and social cohesion.

He also stated that Bill C-9 doesn't threaten religious freedom. It draws a necessary line—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I did say 30 seconds.

The hon. member for York—Durham may give a brief response.

Jacob Mantle: Mr. Speaker, the unanimous voice of Conservatives, non-Conservatives, Canadians of a faith and Canadians of no faith has been that this bill would harm free expression and would derogate from Canadians' right to freely express their religious beliefs. I am sorry, but I disagree with that supporter.

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Elizabeth May (Saaneich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-9, the anti-hate bill. I will start by saying that I hate the bill. I do not know if that is a good thing or a bad thing. Actually, I try not to hold hatred in my heart for any person, but I think when one sees really bad legislation, it is okay to hate it. This is really bad legislation because it has provoked a debate that pits people who should totally agree against each other. All of us in this place, whether Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc members or New Democrats, want to see an end to hatred in this country. We all see every day the dramatic increase in acts of hatred and anti-Semitism, particularly Islamophobia. It is racism. It is despicable. We stand against it, but Bill C-9 has gotten in the way in a way that ties us in knots and is making it more difficult to use the tools we already have, such as section 319 of the Criminal Code.

I will back up and say that I looked for the most recent statement, because there have been some amendments. I appreciate the amendment that says we would need the approval of an Attorney General to prosecute under this act, but that would not remedy the many faults of the bill. I looked for the most recent press release from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association to make sure its views had not changed as a result of recent amendments. It says this very clearly, and I am going to quote from their most recent release:

Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism are on the rise. Communities across this country are worried, and they deserve protection. But Bill C-9 doesn't solve this complex issue. Instead, it hands the government a blunt instrument that history tells us will be turned against the very people it's supposed to help.

Let me speak to what this is talking about. I oppose Bill C-9. Yes, I am a practising Christian, and yes, I believe that the sacred texts of the Quran, the Torah or Bible are religious texts. They are not hate speech, but that is not my big problem with this bill, because I think it is very unlikely, no matter what anyone might say for partisan reasons, that anybody in the Liberal Party wants to prosecute a preacher. That is nonsense. What we are dealing with here, though, is a bill that is so unnecessary that it would create new risks, through vagueness and discretion. These could create real problems that would end up before the courts and get in the way of making sure we have the proper tools to prosecute hate crimes with the laws we already have.

Why do we have Bill C-9? Normally a bill of this weirdness would come because the courts had said something and the government felt compelled.

Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. I have to adjust. The corner I am in is really difficult. I am sorry. I did not mean to complain about the furniture in the middle of a speech.

Normally something like this that appears to be redundant, discretionary and confusing would come about because the Supreme Court has said something criticizing an existing law so that the Department of Justice tries to clarify the law with yet another law on the same subject. However, this is the opposite. The Supreme Court of Canada has already, in numerous decisions, dealt with the big problem that we have. When we are defining hate, when we say hate speech is a crime and when we say there is an identifiable group against whom this speech is directed, we might have this problem, something the courts identify and numerous people identify: What about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, what about our

right to free speech, what about our right to worship as we choose and what about the right of freedom of assembly?

I am now referring to section 319 of the Criminal Code against acts of hate. Do these criminal acts of hate conflict with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Thankfully, in the Keegstra case, in a couple of places, the Supreme Court of Canada has dealt with this. Law enforcement, lawyers and judges across the country have a pathway to know that they can prosecute hate crimes under the Criminal Code and not defy the charter. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled on this, and its rulings are clear. Unfortunately, Bill C-9 is not clear. Bill C-9 would create a whole new discretionary web of things that may or may not be criminal.

● (1345)

I just want to refer briefly to a personal experience I had awhile ago. It was back in 2006. I was not in Parliament. I attended a rally to decry what was then happening. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Israel was bombing Lebanon in an attempt to hit Hezbollah, and Hezbollah was bombing in Israel. I was at a peace rally in Toronto. I was on the back of a flatbed truck. I remember that Judy Rebick was standing with me. I denounced Hezbollah for shooting rockets into Israel. I also denounced the use of rockets from Israel that were hitting civilian targets in Lebanon.

After the rally, it came to my attention through social media that someone had gotten a photograph of me; I had not known about a Hezbollah flag behind me. I would not have recognized the Hezbollah flag if I had fallen into it, but as it was, it was behind me. I did not know it was there. It was clearly a hate symbol. However, not knowing it was there, I equally would not have known, standing there on the back of a flatbed truck, how close I was to a place of worship, a day care centre or a cemetery. I would have had no idea.

When I first read Bill C-9, I thought it was definitely going to impede freedom of assembly and rightful protest. It was going to be very confusing. How will law enforcement deal with a gathering in which a group of people spill onto a side street and do not realize that they might be impeding access to a church they did not know was there? As a lawyer, a civil libertarian and more than an occasional protester, I look at this bill with alarm. It is going to create a lot of confusion and potentially wrongful arrests.

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It has been referenced by some of my hon. colleagues on the Conservative benches that not only does every major religious group in this country express concerns about Bill C-9, but so do the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Black Legal Action Centre. I particularly noted the brief to the committee from the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, which includes groups from around the world expressing concern. We are seeing intrusions on civil liberties; they referenced particularly what we are seeing in the United States, with the U.S. administration's immigration and enforcement group, known as ICE, trampling on civil liberties. It is saying that a person was about to do something, that a person had hate in their heart or whatever. The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group told our parliamentary committee that Canada must be very careful. We should not create offences that can be misunderstood. We should not make openings to have an overreach by law enforcement.

We are seeing, in many countries around the world, overreach by law enforcement. They are anticipating something that I hope we never see in Canada. Although I will say that the so-called industrial resource community group of the RCMP in British Columbia, which is cracking down on non-violent civil disobedience to protect old-growth forests, has frequently violated the charter. I look to them as a worrying example.

Bill C-9 would not solve problems of hate crimes, and it would not give law enforcement new tools. Not only that, but it would create a morass. I am absolutely certain that if this law passes as is, it would waste police resources, waste court time and tie people up in knots in wrongful prosecutions for things that were never hate crimes at all.

With that, I will vote against the bill.

• (1350)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Green Party first said that she was going to vote against the legislation, that she hates the legislation, a lot of Conservatives got fairly excited and happy to hear that. However, let us distinguish whether there is a difference.

I wonder if the leader of the Green Party supports the messages in these quotes that the Conservatives are using in order to raise money. They say that Bill C-9 would punish Canadians for quoting scriptures the government considers politically incorrect. The Liberals' "goal is to expose people of faith to criminal prosecution for a simple act of quoting their own sacred texts." They say the Liberals are trying to push laws that could criminalize passages from the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and other sacred texts.

Does the member believe that the Conservatives are right in making those statements?

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am not in receipt of Conservative fundraising emails, but I will say this: At this point in the history of our Parliament, we need to come together more and not seek reasons to divide. While I decry the use of partisan clickbait, I also decry notions about anyone in this country, regardless of their political party, faith or lack of faith. I am a practising Christian, but I praise all those atheists because, by God, they are great citizens too.

We need to come together, and we need to defeat this bill and use section 319 to stop hate crimes, not—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley.

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member from the Green Party is opposed to the government's bill.

We know that our faith-based communities are at the heart of what it means to be Canadian. In a lot of our small towns in particular, the faith-based groups and churches make sure that many events and community-led initiatives go ahead. They raise the funds, and they provide the volunteers and buildings to hold and host a whole variety of things, whether faith-based or not, in their own buildings. The government dislikes faith-based communities because of these kind of things; they are able to do things that the government is not able to do, such as take care of and look after Canadians. The government has previously tried to remove charitable status from religious groups.

I am wondering if the member shares any concerns with the overall tone that the government has against religious communities.

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where my hon. colleague is coming from, but no. As a fierce opposition party leader and someone who has deep concerns about the direction of the current government, I would say that it does not have an anti-faith group approach, absolutely not. The Prime Minister is a practising Catholic. I compared notes with him about what we have both given up for Lent.

Let us stop thinking that anyone has anything against faith-based groups and work to defend every Canadian's ability, to the best of our ability, to live out their place in this life, for whatever purposes they see in this life. Let us do so for the good of all and stop finding reasons to divide us.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite has been a devout defender of faith. Is she aware that there are current Liberal MPs sitting on the benches who think I should be in prison for quoting scriptures as a youth leader and that they have scheduled a vote during the national prayer dinner?

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong and I did have a personal conversation recently, in which she told me that people thought she should be in jail for that. For any speech, obviously, that would be appalling, and I hope the comments she related to me were meant not in earnest, but offhand, and that the members who might have said that deeply regret it, because it is offensive.

As to the prayer breakfast and dinner, I will be there tonight, and I imagine a lot of us will be doing both.

Statements by Members

● (1355)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the legislation says that in collective areas, it would be a hate crime to prevent someone from being able to go to their church or community centre. I am wondering if the member could provide her thoughts on that issue.

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I have made it clear to the parliamentary secretary before that it would already be a hate crime to direct hatred and acts of hatred toward individuals or an identifiable group, whether they are practising a faith or are identifiable through other means.

The legislation is poorly drafted, and I think the government members will rue the day they force it through.

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House to give my thoughts on Bill C-9.

Hate, threats and intimidation are real. The issue is not whether hate exists, because it does. As a Christian, I condemn it. The issue is the Liberals using Bill C-9 to criminalize lawful speech, emotion and expression, sincerely held religious beliefs and ordinary public discourse. That is what this bill is attempting to do and it is what is at stake in this bill.

Bill C-9 would give the government more power over freedom of speech and expression. It would hand a small, elite group of politicians, prosecutors and activists more power to decide which views held by ordinary Canadians are acceptable and which words should trigger criminal investigations. This should concern every single member of the House.

This bill would move criminal law away from punishing clear criminal acts to punishing contested ideas, alleged motives and beliefs that are at odds with the political agenda of the government. It would put the sincerely held religious beliefs of Canadians in the crosshairs, which are beliefs held by many Canadians today and by most Canadians throughout history.

Violence against Christians is real. When churches are burned, schools are no longer safe and community spaces are targeted, Canadians expect the law to respond and Parliament to speak clearly. The Liberal government has not done that. Many Canadians were stunned that the House could not unanimously condemn church burnings and attacks on religious freedom. Since 2021, there have been more than 100 churches in Canada burned, vandalized or desecrated. Canadians saw it happen. The Liberal government also saw it happen, but it was silent, “crickets”. Before Liberals begin lecturing Canadians about hate, they should explain why they have been so weak when Christian communities have been attacked in this country.

Canadians do not have to guess where this bill is going because the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture already said it plainly. When he was the chair at the justice committee studying this bill, he said that books in the Bible, “Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Romans” were books of “clear hatred” and there “should perhaps be discretion for prosecutors to press charges.” Those are serious words.

What does Romans actually say? Romans is a book in the New Testament of the Holy Bible that was written by the Apostle Paul. We have to understand that Paul was born a Jew. He was raised and

educated in strict Jewish observance of laws, practices and theology, then he had an experience with Jesus and became a Christian. He gave his life to Jesus Christ through faith in him. The central theme of Romans, a book that Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, is the gospel of the revelation of God's righteousness, offering salvation to everyone who believes, regardless of Jewish or gentile background. It focuses on justification by faith alone, the universal need for salvation due to sin and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, public health experts across Canada are clear that supervised consumption sites save lives and connect people to treatment, recovery and support, and yet, in Ontario, the Conservative government is cutting supervised consumption sites. In Alberta, the Conservative government is closing Calgary's only such service, despite the fact that thousands of overdoses have been reversed there without a single recorded death.

Frontline workers, physicians and public health researchers warn that shutting these services would not end substance use. Instead, they warn it would increase overdose deaths, push drug use further into public spaces and place greater strain on already overburdened emergency services, hospitals and law enforcement.

At a time when families and communities are grieving profound loss, Canadians expect leadership from the federal government grounded in evidence, compassion and public health. We have to strengthen the full continuum of care, not weaken it. Lives depend on it.

* * *

DAVID BARNETT

Wade Grant (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to pay tribute to a man I was lucky enough to get to know over the last 10 years. David Barnett of my riding of Vancouver Quadra passed away on February 5 at the age of 53, after a courageous battle with a rare and aggressive form of cancer.

Dave was executive vice-president of the Dayhu Group of Companies, working alongside his brother Jonathan to build on their family's 70-year legacy in real estate.

However, what I will remember him for and what he may be best remembered for is founding the Music Heals Charitable Foundation with his wife Sara Ferguson. Together, they helped fund music therapy programs across British Columbia and Canada with over \$5 million.

David's life was far too short, but his impact was undoubtedly profound. He was known for his kindness, his generosity and his warmth.

I offer my heartfelt condolences to his wife Sara; their children Asher, Cassidy and Zoe; and his parents Shirley and Peter. May his memory be for a blessing.

* * *

APRIL CELEBRATIONS

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, April brings several holidays across Canada, each with its own traditions.

For Christians, it is time to reflect on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the hope it represents. For many Canadians, Easter is also a chance to spend time with family, enjoy the arrival of spring and, for kids, maybe a bit too much chocolate from the Easter bunny.

For Jewish families, Passover is a time to come together in celebration of liberation and tradition. I wish all Jewish Canadians a kosher and joyous Passover.

For Sikhs, Vaisakhi is a significant and sacred day. It represents renewal and the core values of equality and selflessness. I am truly looking forward to celebrating Vaisakhi at the Surrey parade and especially here at Parliament Hill. To everyone celebrating, from my family to theirs, *Vaisakhi diyan lakh lakh vadhaiyan*.

Regardless of what people are celebrating, may April be full of family joy and moments worth remembering.

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[Translation]

IRISH HERITAGE MONTH

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this morning to mark Irish Heritage Month. For many years, men and women from Ireland have been coming here to build a better life. They have made a significant contribution to Canada. Many of these families have lived in my riding of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie for a long time. They have helped to build the social, economic and community fabric of our region.

Yesterday we celebrated St. Patrick's Day. I had the pleasure of attending the parade in Montreal. It was very moving to walk down the street with people who are so proud of their roots. As the month comes to a close, I invite everyone to continue celebrating Irish culture and history and the contributions of Irish Canadians here and everywhere.

Statements by Members

RODGER BRULOTTE

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Rodger Brulotte, a legend in sports and broadcasting in Quebec and Canada. He was a larger-than-life figure whose voice and enthusiasm left a mark on generations of baseball fans.

I was lucky enough to meet Rodger on a few occasions and I had the privilege of hosting an event with him. I witnessed his infectious passion, his generosity and his genuine love for the sport and for people. Rodger Brulotte was more than just an exceptional sports commentator. He was a community builder, an ambassador and someone who brought people together through his passion.

Today we have lost a giant, but his legacy will live on in our memories and in the hearts of all those he inspired. On behalf of my party and all Canadian parliamentarians, I offer my deepest condolences to his wife, Pascale, his family and his many friends.

Since Rodger asked that his passing be announced with his catchphrase, let me say, “Bonsoir, il est parti!” May he rest in peace.

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● (1405)

AUTISME LAVAL

Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to recognize the outstanding work of Autisme Laval as part of Autism Awareness Month. For over 40 years, April has been an important opportunity to raise public awareness, break the stigma and promote a more inclusive society. Every person with an autism spectrum disorder has a unique path and talents that should be recognized and supported.

Autisme Laval plays a key role in the Laval community, particularly through its partnerships with Le Chat botté and TSA Sans Frontières. Their activities create spaces for dialogue, support and inclusion for families and people with autism. Let us continue to build a more open, respectful and inclusive society.

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[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Financial Times reports that LNG flows from the gulf could be disrupted within days with a glut of demand, a European fuel shortage, Beijing's control over rare earth minerals and Russia's leverage over energy.

Statements by Members

The world is now scrambling for everything Canada has. Alberta's 158 billion barrels of oil and enough natural gas to power the world for 200 years is landlocked. KXL, energy east and northern gateway with \$55 billion in growth are gone; \$11 billion a year from LNG alone is gone; while \$670 billion in projects and generational jobs is gone. Imagine a country this vast in resources, yet half of its people live paycheque to paycheque.

We should not be strengthening Beijing's new world order. We should be replacing it instead with one underpinned by Canadian resources.

We do not need bureaucracy; we need projects. We do not need platitudes; we need decisions. We do not need middling thinking; we need the strength and ambition of a major power right now.

* * *

[Translation]

INNOVATION AND DEFENCE

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about national defence, we are talking about our armed forces. However, we also need to talk about our businesses, our regions and our ability to innovate.

SMEs, research centres and entrepreneurs in the Laurentians want to contribute to Canada's defence industrial strategy and the major investments that were announced. These investments are creating practical opportunities to innovate, co-operate and strengthen our national security. It is with that in mind that Connexion Laurentides will be hosting an innovation and defence event on March 31 in Mirabel, with the help of several local MPs, including the members for Thérèse-De Blainville, Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation and, of course, Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

I invite businesses and MPs to participate so that they can find out about all of the business opportunities that are available and take advantage of them. That is how we are building a stronger economy and strengthening our Canadian sovereignty.

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[English]

SUDBURY EAST—MANITOULIN—NICKEL BELT

Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome two constituents from my part of northern Ontario, who join us today from Espanola: Matthew Hannah and his mother, Rebecca. I first met Matthew at a meet-and-greet where he impressed me with his strong knowledge of Canada's parliamentary democracy and its leaders, past and present. From a young age, Matthew has shown a genuine passion for Canadian politics and has already become an active political volunteer with a deep respect for our democratic institutions.

As he experiences Parliament first-hand, I want to thank Matthew and all young volunteers for their dedication to our democracy.

I would like to wish them a wonderful day in our nation's capital.

[Translation]

RODGER BRULOTTE

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for decades, summer in Quebec had a soundtrack: the subtle buzz of lights, the crack of a bat, the snapping of a leather glove and Rodger Brulotte's unique voice. He brought the melody of baseball to the soul of Quebecers.

Rodger Brulotte, a proud ambassador for our Expos, has passed away. Starting out on radio, then moving on to TV, Rodger was the voice of baseball in Quebec for more than 40 years. He has also left his mark on amateur baseball in Quebec, in the charities he supported, in his columns and in the hearts of an entire nation. We had hoped he could be with us when our Expos finally make their comeback.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I offer my deepest condolences to his spouse, Pascale, his loved ones and all sports fans. A part of Rodger Brulotte will always be with us as long as our children continue to walk up to home plate with determination. With sadness in our hearts, we must face the truth. Rodger has called his final home run.

* * *

● (1410)

ROLAND DAGENAI

Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to pay tribute to a man who had a profound impact on the riding of Thérèse-De Blainville: Roland Dagenais, the founder of La Popote à Roland.

Mr. Dagenais was ordained as a priest in 1954, and he soon became a fixture in his community of Blainville. In 1977, he was very concerned to see that too many seniors were living in isolation, and so he and members of the parish launched a simple initiative that involved offering a warm meal and an opportunity for people to get together every week. Thus began La Popote à Roland. One Wednesday at lunchtime, I had a opportunity to drop in for a visit myself. It is easy to see why this organization is so important to local residents. Seniors gather there every week, and it obviously does them good.

Roland Dagenais was also an avid traveller. He travelled around the world, from Asia to South America, but he left one of his greatest legacies at home in Thérèse-De Blainville. For nearly 50 years, hundreds of seniors have been gathering there every week to share a lot more than just a meal. Today, we simply want to say thank you to him.

Statements by Members

[English]

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today as the chair of the 60th annual National Prayer Breakfast. This is truly a historic event that takes place on the Hill each year, where we gather in the spirit of Christ and pray for our country. This non-partisan Christian event is the highlight for many of us, and I am pleased to say that we had a record attendance.

This year's theme is that we are not alone, for we are assured that God is with us and that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, as is stated in scripture. It is a message that calls us to remember those who came before us, the enduring role of faith and the role it has played in shaping Canada's history, institutions and sense of service.

I offer a special thanks to my colleagues, as well as our staff, the volunteers and all the attendees who are praying with us either in person or from across the country. This event would not be possible without them.

We pray that Canada will continue to be the true north, strong and free. As our beloved national anthem declares, may God continue to “keep our land glorious and free”.

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WORLD WATER DAY

Hon. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Water Day, a moment to reflect on an extraordinary truth, which is that Canada is a water nation. We are home to 20% of the world's fresh water. This abundance shapes our lives, provides safe drinking water, sustains agriculture and fisheries, and supports our economy. For indigenous peoples, water holds deep cultural and spiritual meaning. For all Canadians, it is part of who we are, yet we have too often taken it for granted.

Climate change is bringing more floods and droughts, while pollution and invasive species threaten our waters. That is why we are taking action through the new Canada Water Agency and a strengthened freshwater action plan.

I want to recognize the Bruce fellows students at Toronto Metropolitan University who will be presenting a petition calling for a Canada water week. It is a reminder that the next generation is stepping forward to protect this vital resource, because protecting our water is a shared responsibility between this generation and those that follow.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, French remains fragile, whether in culture, sports or our daily lives.

Friday, March 20, was the International Day of La Francophonie, an important time to celebrate the richness, vitality and diversity of the French language around the world. Although I am a little late in rising to acknowledge it today, the message remains the same: La

Francophonie is about more than just a one-day to celebration. We need to live in French and defend the French language every day.

In francophone communities across Canada, French is much more than a means of communication. It is a source of identity and pride. We must take concrete, consistent and sincere steps to protect and promote French and foster its growth throughout the country.

French language and culture are a valued legacy, but they are also a shared responsibility. Let us therefore continue to speak French, work in French and promote our language with pride today, tomorrow and every day.

* * *

● (1415)

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year on March 20, we mark the International Day of La Francophonie. With over 320 million speakers worldwide, the French language serves as a bridge between communities, a source of cultural wealth and a driving force for international co-operation.

In Canada, and Quebec in particular, French lies at the heart of our identity. It shapes our culture, our history and our ability to live together in harmony. As the member of Parliament for Bourassa, I am proud to represent an area with a vibrant, diverse francophone community made up of active citizens from all sorts of backgrounds.

Today, let us celebrate the French language, but let us also remember our collective responsibility to protect, promote and showcase it both here and abroad. Preserving French means defending more than just words. It means protecting a way of thinking, living and laughing, with nuance, dignity and humanity.

*Oral Questions**[English]***THE ECONOMY**

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has lost over 100,000 jobs in the first two months of this year. Canada is the only shrinking economy, and it has the second highest unemployment, the highest household debt and the highest food inflation in the G7. The Liberal Prime Minister cannot just blame global factors when the other members of the G7 are dealing with the same issues. These are problems the Liberals have created and that this Liberal Prime Minister has worsened. He is running the biggest deficit and the highest spending this country has ever seen outside of COVID, and the results are disappearing jobs and a shrinking economy.

He failed to unlock growth by killing anti-energy laws and red tape. He failed to approve a single new pipeline or major project, and he failed to secure a trade deal by his promised date, July 2025. The Liberals need to get out of the way so Canadians can get back to work. If this is the Prime Minister's version of economic success, Canadians truly cannot afford to see his version of failure.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN BURNABY CENTRAL

Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate the upcoming 95th birthday of Johnny Virani, a respected elder in Burnaby Central and the uncle of former minister of justice Arif Virani. Born in Uganda, his life is a testament to resilience, service and the lasting contribution of seniors to our communities. His legacy shows that our country is strengthened by the wisdom and dedication of those who came before us.

I also want to recognize a group of high school students visiting from British Columbia. Their presence in Ottawa demonstrates that our democracy thrives when young people engage, question and participate. At a time when anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, racism, discrimination and misogyny are rising in Canada, Canada will look to young people to raise their voice, lead with purpose and bring people together. It is in this partnership between generations, where the wisdom of our seniors meets the courage of our youth, that we find our strength. We will build the Canada of tomorrow, united, with every generation shaping and moving forward as one.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***EMPLOYMENT**

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 108,000 full-time jobs were lost in the last month alone. We are losing jobs at speeds not seen in a generation. We have the only shrinking economy, the second-highest unemployment, the highest household debt and the highest food inflation in the G7. The Minister of AI blamed job numbers on the war in Iran. The Prime Minister says that they are not so bad.

People have had enough Liberal excuses. They want more Canadian jobs. Will the Liberals finally get out of the way so Canadians can get back to work?

[Translation]

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will, of course, be answering all questions, but I first want to express my profound sadness and that of the entire House of Commons following today's accident at LaGuardia Airport involving an Air Canada Express aircraft.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I want to extend my deepest condolences to the victims' families and loved ones, the injured and their families, and everyone concerned. As the Minister of Transport, I can say that my department works hard to ensure that every employee in the transportation sector gets home every night. When that does not happen, we look for answers. I can assure everyone that Canada is looking for answers. I have spoken to my American counterpart, and Canadians are at LaGuardia today to get to the bottom of this accident.

● (1420)

[English]

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives share our condolences as well.

On the issue of jobs, 108,000 full-time jobs and almost 50,000 youth jobs were lost in one month alone. The Liberal Prime Minister is responsible for generational deficits and generational job losses. Development is blocked, and not a single major project is approved.

This fall, I announced the Conservative jobs plan: unleashing the economy, fixing immigration, fixing training and building homes where the jobs are. After a year of failure, why will the Liberals not simply adopt the plan that we have already put forward?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course, we will be answering all the questions from the opposition today, but I first want to express my sincere condolences and shock, frankly, as well as that of all members of the House, after the incident that occurred late last evening at LaGuardia Airport involving an Air Canada Express aircraft. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I offer my sincere condolences to the families of the victims and all of the many people who will have been shaken and affected by this incident.

I have spoken with Secretary Duffy, my American counterpart. We will continue to work together to get to the bottom of this to find the answers that Canadians will be looking for. We will get those answers for them.

Oral Questions

Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody, not even the Liberal government, can sugar-coat the findings in the most recent jobs report. It revealed the largest collapse in full-time jobs since COVID. Over 100,000 jobs were lost, with a youth unemployment rate of 14% now. TD called it “weak”, while CIBC called it “very bad”, and BMO called it “simply brutal”.

However, it is more than just words. It is empty bank accounts, skipped meals and fleeting hope. We need action now. Will the government commit today to adopting our Conservative jobs plan to get the economy back on track and people back to work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is shameful to see the Conservatives talking down the Canadian economy. Canadians are proud people. We have the most educated workforce in the world. We build ships, cars and planes. We have critical minerals, and we have energy. We are the only G7 country that has a trade agreement with all the other G7 nations.

On this side of the House, we are proud of our workers, we are proud of our industry and we believe in Canada.

Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is shameful is an answer like that from somebody who has been here for 10 years and whose government has created a homegrown problem with out-of-control taxes, out-of-control spending and mountains of red tape. Now we have the only shrinking economy in the G7, the second-highest unemployment rate, the highest household debt and the highest food inflation. Everyone else is dealing with the tariff war too.

When will the government admit that its policies are killing jobs and reverse course before it kills even more next month?

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 almost as if the Conservatives do not understand that we are in a tariff war and that there is a war in the Middle East threatening the Canadian economy right now. We have been preparing to support workers in these turbulent times, but yet again, they vote against every measure we put forward for workers.

That is not what the Ontario government is saying. I was so proud to sign the Canada-Ontario workforce tariff response. In fact, we got support from Vic Fedeli, Mike Harris and Premier Ford.

The provinces are working with the federal government to take care of workers. All we hear from that side is their voting against workers time and again.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, this Liberal Prime Minister promised to reach an agreement with the Trump administration. He promised to create jobs and boost Canada's economy. Today, the cracks are showing in the Liberal veneer.

More than 108,000 Canadians have lost their jobs since the start of 2026. Canada has the second-worst unemployment rate and the worst food inflation in the G7. There is still no deal on tariffs.

Canadian steel mills like Algoma Steel are shutting down. It has been a year, and the damage caused by the Liberals over the past 10 years continues.

When are the Liberals going to get rid of their taxes, their anti-development policies and bureaucracy so that Canadians can get to work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a question like that is not very polite.

Canadians are standing together and keeping their elbows up, and we, on this side of the House, are proud of this country. Canada has one of the most highly educated populations in the world. We are proud to build ships, planes and cars. We are proud of the Algoma Steel workers still on the job. We are proud to have critical minerals. We are proud to have energy. We are proud to be the only G7 country that has a free trade agreement with every G7 nation.

Instead of criticizing Canada, the member should stand up and take pride in this country, like we do.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the minister, it is clear that he is not proud of the Liberal's 10-year record on the economy. The Liberals like to blame everybody but themselves. That is what they do.

Still, all G7 countries are facing the same challenges. Why is Canada the only one whose economy is shrinking? Canada has the worst performance in the G7. The Liberals created these problems, and the current Liberal Prime Minister made them worse. Quebec lost 57,000 jobs in February alone, and Canada lost more than 100,000.

Why have the Liberals given Canada the absolute worst economy?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct something my colleague said. It is not true that Algoma Steel is shutting down. That would be an insult to all the employees, the more than 2,000 employees who are still working at Algoma in Sault Ste. Marie. The member should do his homework.

One thing is clear. We are going to bring jobs back to Algoma Steel. What I want to say to all Canadians watching us right now is that we have a solid plan. We have launched the defence industrial strategy, which is going to create 125,000 jobs in Canada. We will invest in our armed forces, which will also create jobs.

*Oral Questions***JUSTICE**

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is happening today at the Supreme Court is the ultimate constitutional power grab. The Government of Canada is not content to simply attack state secularism by challenging Bill 21. It wants to prevent Quebec from passing any law that Ottawa does not like by limiting the use of the notwithstanding clause.

The Liberals are using the highest court to undermine Quebec and diminish the will of Quebecers for all time. Do they understand that this would be the biggest setback for Quebec's autonomy in 45 years?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I thank my colleague for her question. As the member is well aware, the federal government must defend the Constitution. This case is now before the Supreme Court of Canada. That is the appropriate forum to discuss this issue. It would not be appropriate for me, as Attorney General, to debate this matter in the House of Commons.

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what is happening at the Supreme Court goes beyond political allegiances. Yes, secularism is being debated today in relation to Bill 21, but there is also the notwithstanding clause, and that is far more significant. That clause enabled us to require that signage be in French in Quebec. The notwithstanding clause has enabled us to pass no fewer than 41 Quebec laws throughout history, all of which are linked to our identity and social progress.

Do the Liberals realize that attacking the notwithstanding clause is tantamount to attacking everything that makes Quebec what it is?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. As she knows, our position is clear and always has been. We are the party of the charter; we will defend the charter, and we will do so before the Supreme Court.

Now, as the Minister of Justice said, the case is before the Supreme Court and, ultimately, the fate of Bill 21 will be decided by the Supreme Court justices. It would be inappropriate for us to comment at this stage, and our position has been clear for a long time.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are attacking secularism by challenging Bill 21 before the Supreme Court. However, they go a lot further when they talk about limiting the use of the notwithstanding clause. They want veto power over Quebec's laws. Quebec's democracy would be subject to the whims of elected officials and judges from English Canada. The notwithstanding clause was the compromise that made the charter's enactment in 1982 possible. Without the notwithstanding clause, there would be no charter.

Will today's Liberals do the right thing and honour the compromise signed by the Liberals in 1982?

● (1430)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speak-

er, it is astounding to see the Bloc Québécois try to dodge the real issue of concern to all Quebecers, certainly to those living in the Outaouais. I am talking about the economic apocalypse that the leader of the Parti Québécois wants to unleash on the Outaouais region. He looked into the camera and said "it is what it is" to the hundreds, if not tens of thousands, of public servants in the Outaouais region and across Canada.

It is disgraceful. The Bloc Québécois should stand up for these Quebecers, the ones helping us build Canada today.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after a year of the Liberal Prime Minister, Canadians got more rhetoric, not results. Instead of energy security and thousands of new jobs, the Liberals blocked pipelines. Instead of investments and growth, the Liberals drove out more than half a trillion dollars' worth of it. Liberals liberalled.

Canada finished 2025 with a shrinking economy, the second-highest unemployment rate and the highest household debt and food inflation in the G7. Can someone over there explain why Canada has the second-worst unemployment and the only shrinking economy in the G7?

Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, oil and gas production in Canada is up 34% over the last 10 years. Compare that to global production, which is up only 6%. These are record production levels that we are seeing.

We are seeing new infrastructure coming all the time. Obviously, there is Trans Mountain. We are now talking about optimizing that. We have Ksi Lisims. We have Taylor to Gordondale. We have Nexgen's and Denison's uranium mines. We have LNG projects from Cedar to Woodfibre, Tilbury and LNG Canada phase two.

We are building, and we will continue to build. We welcome the Conservatives to get on board.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that guy from Alberta should be ashamed of himself for supporting the same government that keeps blocking pipelines and other energy projects. That is why 100,000 jobs were lost in the last month. Most of those were in the private sector.

Other G7 countries' economies are growing. Canada's is shrinking. We are all facing the same global factors. It is shrinking because the Prime Minister keeps raising the deficits and his taxes.

Oral Questions

Why do the Liberals not put their taxes, policies and deficits out of work so that Canadians can get back to work?

The Speaker: I know he meant “that hon. member”.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources.

Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I feel sad for the members opposite, who look through the good news to find the bad news every day and bring their misery to the chamber.

Here is the absolute reality. There has never been a better time to be in energy in Alberta. There has never been a better time to be in energy in Canada. We are building, and we are building strong. We welcome the Conservatives to get on board.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, over 100,000 jobs were lost in the first two months of this year. Today, Algoma Steel will be laying off 1,000 workers. These are families who are now left wondering how they are going to pay their bills and put food on their tables.

After years of warning signs, the Liberal government continues to impose policies that weaken our competitiveness and cost Canadian jobs. Will the Liberals explain why they have given Canada the second-worst unemployment and the only shrinking economy in the G7?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, it is a tough day for many families in Sault Ste. Marie and many workers at Algoma, but we will bring back these jobs. We are working on the plan to make sure that the workers get their jobs back.

I have been to Sault Ste. Marie twice. I have met with the Algoma Steel CEO. I am meeting with him again. They have two interesting projects. The first one is on the defence front, and the second one is in infrastructure. We will build homes in Canada using steel from Algoma, and we will build ships, planes and vehicles across the country with Algoma steel as well.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to taking responsibility, the Liberal government has a long record of making excuses and getting very few results. After 10 years, Canadians are carrying record household debt, they are facing the highest food inflation in the G7 and they are living in the only shrinking economy in the G7. These are the consequences of policy choices that have driven up costs and made it harder for businesses to grow and create those jobs.

When will the Prime Minister cut his taxes, slash red tape and empower our businesses so that Canadians can get back to work?

• (1435)

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the past week alone, we have announced a \$40-billion plan to transform Canada's north and Arctic, with \$10 billion in major projects; a \$900-million investment to support drone development and quantum technologies; a \$200-million investment in Canada's space launch capabilities in Atlantic Canada; a \$300-million contract for new modular assault rifles; and over \$1.4 billion

for domestic ammunition production in Ontario and Quebec. Our focus is on delivering security, sovereignty and thousands of jobs.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Algoma Steel is laying off 1,000 workers today, who will join the 108,000 full-time workers who lost their jobs in February. The Liberal government cannot blame outside factors. The rest of the world exists in the same global economy, but only Canada has a shrinking economy among G7 countries.

When will the Liberals get out of the way and get rid of their taxes, antidevelopment laws and bureaucracies that are killing Canadian jobs, and let Canadians get back to work?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of time and respect for my colleague, but when he says we cannot blame anything happening in the world for what is happening at Algoma, I think he does not understand the 50% tariffs by Washington against Algoma workers, because that is the reality.

We have been in solution mode. We have said that for the 1,000 workers at Algoma, we will be there to support them and help them find jobs.

We are also in discussion with Tenaris, an important steel company in Sault Ste. Marie. We will create jobs at Tenaris as well.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has spent the last 10 years setting the stage for today's rising unemployment. The industrial carbon tax, antidevelopment laws, bloated bureaucracy, staggering debt and deficits, failure to approve a single pipeline, failure to build any major projects, which it promised to do, and its failure to secure a trade deal, which it also promised to do, are all killing Canadian jobs.

When will the Liberal government at least stop making things worse?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me bring some facts to this discussion.

Oral Questions

Fact one is that Canada has the lowest net debt-to-GDP in the G7. Fact two is that Canada has one of the lowest deficits-to-GDP in the G7. Fact three is that Canada has the second-fastest growing economy in the G7. Fact four is that we have attracted more foreign direct investment lately than we did in the last 18 years.

We should celebrate Canada, celebrate our workers and celebrate our industry. Canada will build the strongest economy in the G7.

Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has already lost 100,000 jobs this year, and today, Algoma Steel is laying off 1,000 workers. The Liberal Prime Minister cannot blame only global factors, because Canada has the only shrinking economy, the second-highest unemployment, the highest food inflation and the highest household debt in the G7. These are problems that the Liberals created, and the Liberal Prime Minister has made it worse by blocking growth with anti-energy laws, failing to approve a single new major project and breaking his promise to secure a trade deal last year.

When will the Liberals get their taxes and policies out of the way so that Canadians can get back to work?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be in Sault Ste. Marie not 10 days ago to meet with the United Steelworkers and representatives of Algoma Steel, who are proud to be deploying the most efficient and largest electric arc furnace in North America. They are going to be able to produce steel for our ships, for our homes, for applications all over the country and, surprise, also for a high-speed rail network.

This is important work. This is going to be done by the men and women of the United Steelworkers in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma.

* * *

• (1440)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there has been a dramatic turn of events in the Cúram software saga. For weeks now, the Liberals have been insisting that there are no cost overruns even though costs have jumped from \$1.75 billion to \$6.6 billion.

On Friday, the federal government admitted to the media that the \$6.6-billion figure was far from a grand total. The Liberals admitted that they forgot to include operating costs. According to one expert, this could cost an additional \$660 million per year. That is a bit like paying for a SAAQclic scandal every year.

When will there be an independent public inquiry?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the number of Canadians waiting to start their OAS is declining. In fact, Canadians expect a modern benefit delivery system that makes sure their benefits are available when they need them.

There were 7.7 million Canadians transferred to the new system without any problem, and those who are waiting are largely paper applications. We have a plan and a process to get through those. If anyone is in urgent need, we can get their money to them within 24 to 48 hours.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, admitting that there is a problem is part of the solution. Every time Ottawa gets involved with IT, it is a disaster.

Today the Auditor General showed us in her report that this is not over yet and that, by replacing the disastrous Phoenix software with a new system called Dayforce, the Liberals are repeating the same mistakes all over again. The Auditor General revealed that they want to speed up the three-year transition, while also ignoring certain expenses. They still want to cut corners, even after having cut corners with Phoenix, Cúram, ArriveCAN, and so on.

When will there be an independent public inquiry into these disasters?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question about the Auditor General's report on the transition to a modern pay system, namely Dayforce.

I want to thank the Auditor General for her report in which she notes that the transition is going well and that progress is being made. She has recommendations and we accept those recommendations. She also says that Canadians will get value for what is being invested in this new system.

It is the opposite of what was done with Phoenix. We have learned from past mistakes. We are proceeding gradually to ensure that the transition is done properly and that public servants get paid on time and accurately.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's economic record is abysmal, with 100,000 jobs lost in two months. Today it was announced that 1,000 workers at Algoma Steel are being laid off.

While our G7 partners are moving forward, Canada is moving backward. How did the Liberals manage to turn Canada into the country with the second-worst unemployment rate and the only declining economy in the G7? How did they do that?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that our thoughts are with the workers at Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie. I had the opportunity to meet with the workers and their union, as well as with Algoma Steel management. We are in problem-solving mode because we know that, contrary to what the Conservatives are saying, these job losses are due to the tariff war.

Nevertheless, we are helping Algoma Steel develop new business projects, projects that will bring jobs back. We are confident that we can achieve this over the next few months.

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Liberals to take off their rose-coloured glasses. It is their taxes, their bureaucracy and their anti-energy laws that are suffocating our businesses. The result is that Canada leads the G7 in food inflation and in household debt.

When will the Liberals get rid of their taxes and their red tape so that Canadian businesses can breathe again and Canadians can finally get back to work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative colleagues seem to be living on a desert island. The reality is that Canada and every other G7 country are facing a trade war.

On this side of the House, we have put forward an ambitious plan to make Canada's economy the strongest in the G7. As I said earlier, contrary to what my colleague said, Canada is in an enviable position in the G7.

We are investing in our businesses, we are investing in our workers and we are investing to make Canada the most resilient economy in the G7.

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague say that we are in the best position in the G7.

Since January 1, our economy has shed 100,000 jobs. Today alone, that figure has risen by another 1,000. We have the highest food inflation rates and the only declining economy in the G7. We have a very high unemployment rate and the highest level of household debt. That is because of the Liberals. Canadians are worried and they are struggling.

When will the Liberals take action by scrapping excessive taxes and red tape so that Canadians can finally live better lives?

• (1445)

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he spoke about action. Taking action means setting up the Major Projects Office and moving construction projects forward, in places like Contrecoeur or Montreal, for example. Last week, I was in Montreal to announce \$459 million in loans to Nouveau Monde Graphite to support 1,300 jobs in Saint-Michel-des-Saints. That is what action looks like.

Action means uniting the Canadian economy to generate economic benefits and boost productivity across the country. Action on affordability means cutting taxes for 22 million Canadians. While

Oral Questions

this government is taking action, MPs on the other side continue their stonewalling day in, day out, which is unfortunate.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 12, in Montreal, 55-year-old Chong Woo Kim was stabbed to death in his own convenience store in broad daylight by Xavier Gellatly, an individual with a years-long record of violent behaviour and serious mental health issues. As far back as 2016, authorities began issuing warnings that he might kill someone if he were released. Despite that, he was released without adequate supervision after serving his sentence.

In the Eustachio Gallese case from a few years ago, the risk assessment conducted by the Parole Board of Canada was called into question.

Warnings were issued in both cases. Why were they ignored?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first extend my condolences to the families who were impacted by this heinous act and let me also assure my colleagues that this was a decision of the independent Parole Board. With the bills that are before the House today, we would strengthen bail, we would strengthen sentencing, we would strengthen the rights of victims and we would work with all parties to ensure the increased safety and security of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at my request here in the House, the public safety committee established a special subcommittee in 2017 to study the case of Eustachio Gallese, who killed Marylène Levesque in Quebec City after being released without proper supervision. Now, years later, we have the same issue, specifically that an individual who should not be out on the street, someone who should not be walking around freely, killed a man in his own convenience store in Montreal.

Apart from saying that it will continue working on this issue, why has the government done nothing in the past seven or eight years?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, let me express my condolences to those who were impacted by this heinous act, but let me also assure Canadians that we are working to strengthen bail laws, strengthen sentencing and strengthen victims' rights, as well as to ensure that those who are impacted by violence are supported through the number of bills that we have.

Oral Questions

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to live in communities that are safe, secure and free from gun violence. Our government made a clear commitment to remove assault-style firearms from our communities.

[Translation]

Firearms like the AR-15, that are designed to kill people, have no place in Canada.

With the March 31 deadline for submitting claims approaching, can the government provide an update on the assault-style firearms compensation program?

[English]

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the assault-style firearms compensation program is a success. Over 51,000 firearms have already been declared, and gun owners will have eight days to submit their declaration. Instead of spreading disinformation, the members of the opposition should help their constituents get the compensation they are entitled to while they still can.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last decade of Liberal government has been absolutely devastating for the Canadian auto industry. We have seen auto production go from two million vehicles a year down to 1.2 million, and even worse, this year we have seen auto exports decline by 55%. This is devastating for auto workers. Plants have closed. Many have lost their livelihoods.

The Liberal plan for the auto sector seems to be “managed decline”. Instead of managed decline, why do they not join us and get tariff-free access to the United States by supporting the Conservative renewed auto pact?

● (1450)

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 in there that do not make sense. First and foremost, every time we invest in the auto sector, the Conservatives talk about it and put it down. What I mean by that is that we have a new auto plan and they are too late. What I mean by that is that they think that we should basically wait for Washington to change its mind or go back to the 1960s with the auto pact. We have a plan. We will protect workers, and we will attract investments.

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what is more troubling: the fact that she does not recognize that a decline from two million vehicles a year to 1.2 million is devastating or the fact that she talks about her plan, which includes exporting vehicles to Europe. More vehicles were stolen in Canada last year, including two of the justice minister's, than were exported to Europe.

We have a plan to get tariff-free access to the United States. It would boost auto production. It is supported by Unifor. Local 222 said, “Finally a common sense plan” to restore auto production.

Why do they not get on board and stop with this managed decline?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what they have is not even a plan. It is an auto pitch, because the reality is that they did not even consult Unifor, the very workers affected by the plant closures. Unifor has said that their ideas will permanently threaten the future of Brampton and Ingersoll plants, which does not make sense.

There is good news in the auto sector. The investment by Toyota and the production at Toyota and Honda is up. We are opening new battery facilities with 3,000 new jobs and we will make sure that the biggest investment by Toyota—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Oshawa.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I was privileged to walk the line at the Oshawa GM assembly plant, speaking with auto workers directly. I could see first-hand the pride, skill and dedication that built Oshawa's auto industry. They are the ones paying the price for the Liberal government's inaction. Uncertainty is making it harder for them to plan their futures and count on stable livelihoods.

We need to protect their jobs and grow Canada's auto industry. Will the Liberals finally stand up for Oshawa and all auto workers and support our Conservative plan for a tariff-free auto pact?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for Oshawa auto workers and my colleagues, but the reality is that she should talk to her colleague from Bowmanville—Oshawa North, who went to Washington and talked down Canadians, saying that we were having a “hissy fit” regarding the trade war and not defending the auto workers or the investment that this government is making in them.

We have an auto plan. It is a good one. She should also talk to Unifor because the union, which represents the workers in Oshawa, is against their plan.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be awfully nice if we saw the Liberal government do something.

I know first-hand that Unifor members love our Conservative auto strategy. Maybe it is time that they spoke with folks on the assembly line.

Oral Questions

Since 2015, auto production in Canada has been cut in half. It is down another 7.8% under the Liberal Prime Minister. At a time when unjustified American tariffs threaten our sector, the Liberals have failed to table a plan that would persuade Americans to remove tariffs on Canadian goods.

Will they support our Conservative plan to double auto production through a tariff-free auto pact?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what workers that member was speaking with, but it sure was not the president of Unifor Local 200, who said, “The problem is that he went ahead and did not consult with Unifor, and it was very, very frustrating to see the things that he put in place knowing we would be in big trouble”. The president, John D’Agnolo, went on to say that he is “ecstatic” over the auto measures, which are “so important to our community” when he was referring to the Liberal plan. He said, “It’s important as time goes by and the market starts to turn...we...give Canadians the option”.

That is what the federal government has done with this policy.

If she wants to know what workers think, she should talk to the union.

* * *

● (1455)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised 1,000 new police officers in their last election campaign. Let us talk about a broken promise. Just today, we learned that not only have they not hired those 1,000 officers, they are down 3,400 police officers. That means we are down over 4,000 police officers from what they told us we would have in the last election.

At a time when crime is skyrocketing, how can Canadians feel safe when these Liberals cannot even hire police officers?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. As part of the platform last year, we committed to hiring 1,000 new CBSA officers as well as 1,000 new RCMP personnel, and we have already started on that process. We had the first cohort of CBSA officers who graduated from Rigaud. The member opposite was in fact invited to the graduation.

We will be rolling out the first cohort of RCMP personnel over the next coming weeks as the new fiscal year begins.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he talks about the new cohort that is being hired. Is that part of the 1,000 who were promised, or the 3,400 we lost? The Liberals cannot distinguish between the two. Let us look at the stats. Violent crime is up 55%: failure. Sexual assault is up 76%: failure. Gun crime is up 130%: failure. Extortion is up 330%: failure. The only thing that is going down is the number of police officers in Canada.

Why can these Liberals not get their act together and hire the police they promised?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the facts. There are 1,000 new CBSA officers, 1,000 new RCMP personnel, \$1.3 billion for border security and Bill C-12, the strong borders act. We have Bill C-14, which would strengthen bail as well as sentencing. We have Bill C-16, which would strengthen victims’ rights.

That is the record of this government. We are going to be making sure that every Canadian feels safe in their community. That is the work that this government has been doing since April 28 of last year.

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals talk about hiring 1,000 new RCMP officers. They cannot even keep up with losses. The Liberals are failing to recruit, train and retain the police we need to protect our communities. In rural Canada, which I represent, police are stretched to the breaking point. They cannot keep up with the wave of violent crime that the Liberals have unleashed. The Auditor General has now reported that under the Liberals’ watch, the RCMP is short 3,400 officers, and the gap is continuing to grow.

The Liberal Prime Minister and his party made big promises to Canadians. They promised 1,000 new officers, but they are yet again failing to deliver any results. It is time for these Liberals to stop promising and start delivering. Why will they not?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting, when we dig into the plans that each of the parties put forward, to identify what their priorities really are. The Conservatives are criticizing us for failing to deliver on 1,000 new RCMP officers, which the minister said are going to be graduating over the next number of weeks. What is fascinating is that the number of RCMP officers the Conservatives committed to hiring during the last electoral campaign is zero.

We are supporting the front line not only with making new hires but also by giving law enforcement the tools they have asked for to keep our communities safe. The Conservatives have opposed us at every turn. Despite their opposition, we are going to work with the law enforcement that will keep communities safe.

Oral Questions

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can try to distract and make Canadians look away from their absolute failure. The Auditor General's report is damning: 3,400 RCMP officers short. The Liberal government is continuing to fail to train and retain the officers we need to protect our communities, and it could not come at a worse possible time. After 10 years of the justice minister's failure to toughen up our justice system, there is a wave of violent crime rushing across our country and our police are completely burnt out.

Why is the Liberal Prime Minister failing to live up to his promises to strengthen law enforcement and protect our communities?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has accused us of trying to distract. Let me be clear: I have no interest in distracting from the fact that the Conservatives campaigned on a commitment to hire zero new RCMP officers. I have no intention to distract from the fact that their leader has called the RCMP leadership "despicable" and called upon the justice system to jail his political opponents.

Our legislative agenda has gained endorsements from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the National Police Federation, the Police Association of Ontario and the New Glasgow Regional Police force, for what it is worth. We will work with law enforcement agencies to keep our communities safe. If the Conservatives finally decide to co-operate, I would be—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Oxford.

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Prime Minister promised safety with 1,000 new RCMP officers, but that is just typical banker spin. The Auditor General is now reporting that there is a 3,400 officer shortage with the RCMP. Recruitment is failing. Training seats are going unfilled, and after a year-long process only 6% of applicants are making it through.

With crime rising at alarming levels, when will the Liberal Prime Minister stop his illusions and bring boots to the ground and protect Canadians?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me just say that the first 1,000 RCMP officers we are going to be hiring will be coming out very shortly. We have also started to roll out the 1,000 new CBSA officers.

What will be important for members opposite to reflect on is their commitment to the RCMP. On this side of the House, we support the RCMP. We support law enforcement. We have introduced Bill C-22 respecting lawful access that would give law enforcement officers the necessary tools that they have been asking for to ensure the safety and security of Canadians.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's north is undergoing profound and rapid change. Climate change and in-

creasing activity from foreign actors are reshaping the region in real time.

In Labrador, we understand well what it means to move from reliance to resilience and to ensure our north remains strong, secure and defended. Given our government's plan to defend the Arctic and the north, can the Minister of National Defence update the House on how these generational investments will strengthen Canada's north?

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is up to us to defend and secure Canada from existing and emerging threats. That is why we are moving forward with a \$35-billion plan to defend, build and transform Canada's northern and Arctic region. This includes \$32 billion for our forward and deployed operating bases, including 5 Wing Goose Bay in Labrador. We are making major generational investments that matter to build Canada strong and to keep Canada strong.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are nearly three million non-citizens in Canada on expired or expiring work permits, and Canadian kids cannot find jobs. Today in a report that shocked no one, the Auditor General found a whopping 150,000 cases of foreign student permit fraud. Worse, we found out that the minister is only investigating 2,000 of them, while allocating resources to purchase an entire hotel for asylum seekers. What a dumpster fire.

Is the minister content with putting fraudsters in the driver's seat of Canada's immigration system?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her performance.

With regard to the Auditor General, we welcome that report. We agree that strong oversight helps improve the international student program. We will improve how cases are flagged and prioritized, and will consistently follow up on potentially non-compliant students. Our focus is on identifying organizers of coordinated fraud and those who attempt to deceive the system. We take the integrity of all our programs very seriously.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by the minister's response, I think she thinks this is a joke. It is not. Canada has an unemployment crisis, and there are millions of non-citizens who do not have a legal reason to be here who are competing for Canadian kids' jobs. Today the Auditor General found out that there were 150,000 cases of fraudulent student permits.

The minister's own team does not think she is up to the job and I agree. Why does she still have her job?

[Translation]

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we commend the work of the Auditor General. We are focusing on identifying fraudsters and those who attempt to deceive us. We are improving our case reporting and prioritization processes and are closely monitoring students who do not comply with our rules. We take the integrity of all our programs very seriously.

• (1505)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually think the immigration system is worse now than it was under Justin Trudeau, and that is quite a feat. Speaking of former immigration ministers, two of the previous ones said that issuing well over a million foreign student permits was good for our economy and did not think international students were taking away jobs from people. However, today we found out from Blacklock's that the employment ministry knew for certain that this is exactly what was happening. All of these people fail upward in cabinet. Nothing has changed and it needs to.

Why are these failed immigration ministers still in cabinet in charge of important files and failing?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really feel sad for that member who always sees her cup as half empty.

We have a plan. We have a system that is working. TD, Stats Canada, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and CMHC have all commented that our plan is working. Over the last year, we have reduced temporary resident arrivals by more than half. We brought the asylum numbers down by a third. We refocused on economic immigration like never before. Canadians see that this new government has a plan. The plan is working and that is what we will continue to do.

[Translation]

Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ontario is home to a vibrant francophone community. Now more than ever, I am proud to rise in the House to celebrate the wealth of the French language. The International Day of La Francophonie is an important time to strengthen the francophone presence and attract and retain francophone talent in Ontario and across Canada.

Can the Minister of Immigration tell us what our government is doing to better support francophone communities across the country?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent work. Last week, on the International Day of La Francophonie, I announced new funding in support of francophone immigration. With these investments, we are strengthening the ability of francophone minority communities to attract and retain skilled workers.

Oral Questions

That is how we are going to reach our objectives and ensure the vitality of French here, in Canada.

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[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been caught misleading Canadians. After his trip to Beijing, he claimed human rights violations and foreign interference were discussed in meetings with CCP leaders. However, the government documents I requested revealed that neither of these topics were discussed in any of the bilateral meetings. Today, the Prime Minister is trying to change his story yet again.

Canadians want to know: Why can the Prime Minister not stick to his story?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary return in question was submitted in error and will be corrected at the earliest opportunity. The Prime Minister has been clear that while in Beijing Canada's positions on areas of concern, including human rights, were raised proactively at multiple levels, including by the Prime Minister and his counterparts. I also raised the matter with my counterpart while in China, along with other matters. I want to emphasize that Canada is a world leader in advancing human rights and the rules-based international order.

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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the last atmospheric river and flooding in the Sumas Prairie, the Liberals promised support, but those were just empty words. Last week, there were two atmospheric rivers, but the Liberal government continues to delay action on flood protection in this nationally significant corridor for food production. Ottawa has yet to deliver the millions needed for flood mitigation plans, leaving people, infrastructure and farmland at risk.

When will the Prime Minister deliver the funding needed to protect this vital economic corridor?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski (Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can advise that I have been in contact with officials in Abbotsford and the Fraser Valley region since December of last year. I have attended meetings with a number of my counterparts there, and we will be taking active steps with Abbotsford to talk about flood mitigation strategies.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1510)

[Translation]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER OF CANADA

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay before the House, pursuant to section 536 of the Canada Elections Act, the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 2025 by-elections.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

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[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 50 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie—Algoma, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, in relation to Bill C-10, an act respecting the commissioner for modern treaty implementation.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

John Williamson (Saint John—St. Croix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The committee requests that the government establish a public and independent inquiry into cost overruns on information technology contracts, including the Phoenix pay system, ArriveCAN and the benefits delivery modernization program.

I would note that the motion was adopted unanimously by the public accounts committee.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

First is the committee's fourth report, entitled "Marine and Coastal Protections".

The next is the fifth report, entitled "Equal Opportunities for Coastal Communities: Attribution of Redfish Quotas and Exploratory Lobster Fishing Licenses". Pursuant to Standing Order

109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the fifth report.

Last but not least is the sixth report, entitled "Main Estimates 2026-27: Votes 1, 5 and 10 under Department of Fisheries and Oceans".

Clifford Small (Central Newfoundland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives have tabled a dissenting report.

The then minister of fisheries, the member for Beauséjour, came to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2018 and talked about how massive the unit one redfish fishery would be. Some harvesters invested up to a million dollars, money they would have had to retire on, to prosecute this fishery. When the decision came down, coastal communities and folks who were adjacent, who would have relied on this unit one redfish fishery, found that it was an absolute bust.

Our report talks about the fact that one of the number one factors in fisheries management, adjacency, was not adhered to properly. We are not quite happy with the report the member referenced, so we have tabled a short summary of how we feel the report could have been better.

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● (1515)

PETITIONS

BASCULE BRIDGE

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from Canadians and residents of eastern Ontario who are concerned about the LaSalle Causeway's Bascule Bridge. This bridge was damaged during work in the spring of 2024, and a modular bridge was installed to allow vehicles and pedestrians to cross. There is now a schedule in place for when the bridge is added and then is removed, at a great cost to taxpayers and with great disruption to tourism in the region and to the travelling public in the community of Kingston and the surrounding areas, including my riding.

Concerned Canadians are calling on the government to commit to having a final replacement bridge operational for May 2027. I think we would find agreement from members on all sides of the House.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present some petitions signed by Canadians who are deeply alarmed by the Liberal-Bloc amendments to Bill C-9 that threaten religious freedom.

The petitioners warn that removing existing safeguards in the Criminal Code could criminalize the sharing of passages from religious texts. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are fundamental rights that must be upheld. Therefore, they call on the government to withdraw this proposal and to protect the right of Canadians to read and share their sacred texts without the fear of criminal sanction.

GAZA

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petition e-7167, signed by nearly 5,000 Canadians from coast to coast to coast. They draw our attention to the fact that Israel has suspended 37 international humanitarian organizations operating in Palestine, including Canadian-based organizations such as Oxfam-Québec. They note that this severely impacts aid and medical services for Gaza.

They call on the Government of Canada to respond to this expulsion of humanitarian aid groups from Palestine by publicly condemning, as unlawful, Israeli and U.S. sanctions against Palestinian human rights organizations; to ensure the safe and uninterrupted passage of humanitarian aid to Gaza; to provide all necessary support to UNRWA; to revoke the status of Canadian charities and other entities supporting illegal settlements on Palestinian territory and Israeli military infrastructure; and to co-operate in forcing International Criminal Court arrest warrants.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise on behalf of the many residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands who raise the issue again of the climate crisis.

In this context, the petitioners ask the House of Commons to recognize that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recognized how much the climate crisis accentuates and increases the societal divides globally, with the global south bearing much of the cost and the burden of climate events, and the urgent need for action to try to avoid more than 100 million people being pushed into poverty as a result of the industrialized world, including Canada's failure to act to pursue our Paris Agreement targets.

The petitioners call for Canada to increase our climate finance commitments towards the global south, providing more funding for adaptation and for projects that also advance a particularly targeted group within Canada and globally: Women are particularly impacted by the climate crisis.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by the freedom-loving Canadians from my riding of Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke. They are concerned over the Liberal government's decision to sign Canada on to the WHO's pandemic agreement that was agreed upon last May, right after Canadians voted in the last election. This legally binding treaty will give unprecedented powers to the unaccountable, unelected UN bureaucrats controlled by Communist China over the authorities and laws passed by our Parliament, elected by Canadians.

The health-conscious petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to immediately and unilaterally withdraw from the WHO's pandemic agreement.

● (1520)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of constituents in Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford to table several petitions, for the very last time, on the Liberal-Bloc amendment to Bill C-9, which would remove the good-

Routine Proceedings

faith religious exemption from the Criminal Code of Canada. This could criminalize clergy, educators or individuals for expressing sincerely held religious beliefs or for quoting sacred texts.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to reject any amendment to Bill C-9 that would remove the good-faith exemption from Canada's hate speech provisions, and to protect Canada's constitutional right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to table a petition on behalf of Vancouver Islanders who are deeply upset and concerned about the cutting of the world-class ghost gear fund. They cite that ghost gear is abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear that is among the deadliest sources of plastic pollution.

The petitioners note that ghost gear kills fish, marine mammals, seabirds and turtles; damages habitats; and creates microplastics and even hazards for navigation and active harvesters, hurting coastal economies. They point out that dedicated funding for retrieval, prevention, repair and recycling works, creating skilled jobs and partnerships with indigenous communities, small businesses, fishers, harbour authorities and recyclers, especially in rural and remote regions.

Petitioners are asking for the ghost gear fund, which helps protect coastal communities and our oceans, to be reinstated.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a revised response to Question No. 257, originally tabled on September 15, 2025, and to Question No. 788, originally tabled on March 13, 2026, and the government's responses to Question Nos. 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838 and 839 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled in an electronic format immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

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

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

COMBATTING HATE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I left off before question period, I was talking about a comment that the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture made at committee. He said that books from the Holy Bible, such as Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Romans, would be considered hate language. We were just diving into Romans and found out that the author was the apostle Paul, who was raised as a Jew in the strict sect of the Pharisees. He had an encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and became a follower of Jesus. He also wrote many of the books in the Gospel of the New Testament.

It is in that sense that we take a deeper look at Romans to see exactly what the minister might mean by “hate language”. We are going to start with what is known as the Romans road, which begins in Romans, chapter 3, verse 10, where it says, “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, not even one...’”. A few verses later, it says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. That talks about all of us. We have all sinned, and we know that. Then Romans, chapter 5, verse 8, says, “But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” As for the posture in which Christ died, we are going to be celebrating that at Easter. It was on a cross with his arms stretched out, the posture of invitation, that he said, “Come to me. I have the answer for all your sins and your brokenness.” That is how he died.

The next one is found in Romans 10, verse 9, where it says, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” It is followed up a few verses later with the assurance that whoever calls on the name of Jesus will be saved. That does not sound like hate language to me. That sounds like God’s love language.

When a Liberal member says passages from the Bible are clearly hateful, that perhaps that should not be available as a defence and that prosecutors should perhaps have discretion to press criminal charges, Canadians need to pay attention. It tells us a great deal about how the government is approaching speech, religion and criminal law. He was not talking about violent criminals. He was talking about the Holy Bible, scriptures that are inscribed and embedded into the architecture of Parliament, that have guided parliamentarians for the past 158 years. These scriptures have shaped our

country and guided generations of Canadians; most Canadians still believe them today. That is why this matters so much.

Once politicians start treating protected religious expression, because they do not necessarily agree with it, as presumptively hateful, the danger is no longer theoretical. It is immediate, visible and real. If passages from the Bible can be spoken of this way by people shaping criminal law, then this bill reaches into sermons, teaching, public witness and the ordinary expression of religious belief. That is the deeper and greater problem with Bill C-9. It reflects a mindset that treats long-standing religious belief as something criminal. If the Prime Minister disagrees with that mindset, he should stand in this House and clearly condemn the comments from his minister. This would send a clear message to Canadians that he will protect the charter rights of freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of religion and that he will vote against this amendment.

Canadians should never have to fear prosecution for quoting the Bible, teaching its doctrine or discussing scriptures in good faith. The Liberal-Bloc amendment in Bill C-9 would remove the current defence for good-faith religious opinion and opinion based on religious text as hate propaganda. This is not some abstract concern. Christians see exactly what it means. It means the government is willing to look at our faith and our biblical scriptures through the lens of criminality. That is a line we must never cross. Broad speech laws rarely remain limited to the extreme cases used to justify them. They begin there and expand outward into lawful disagreement or contentious public matters.

Once the government is given broader power to regulate expression, that power seldom stays confined to real threats, violence or criminal incitement. It starts to extend into ordinary democratic discussion in which Canadians are speaking in good faith about real issues. Canadians should never have to wonder whether taking a clear position on a major public issue could place them under legal suspicion. A free society does not build confidence in the law that way. Parliament should punish actual crimes and protect space for lawful debate on the questions that will determine this country’s direction. This is why the bill presents such a clear and serious danger. It goes beyond stopping violent acts. It opens the door for what is lawful expression, religious belief and principled disagreement today to be criminalized. The House should not permit that.

Government Orders

Conservatives are not defending violence, threats, intimidation or genocide. Those acts are already crimes. The Criminal Code already bans advocating genocide; it already bans public incitement of hatred likely to lead to a breach of the public peace, and it already bans wilful promotion of hatred. The question before us is not whether real criminal hate should be punished. It already can and should be. The question is whether the Liberal government is using real criminal hatred as a reason to widen the law into speech, belief, emotion and motive.

• (1525)

This is what Bill C-9 would do. It would remove safeguards and expand the reach of hate-related offences beyond the law we already have. We have seen, in the U.K. and Australia, that dissenting voices are already being prosecuted.

Once governments give themselves broad power over speech and expression, they tend to keep using it. When governments get used to treating speech as a problem to manage, the law starts to move in the wrong direction, and that is why Canadians should pay attention not only to what Bill C-9 says but to where it points.

Religious Canadians are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for the continued charter right to live in freedom according to their beliefs without being criminalized by their own government. They are asking to read their scriptures, teach their children, speak plainly in public and worship without fearing their long-held religious convictions.

To wrap up, this should not be controversial. It should be the minimum standard in a free country. Conservatives believe that public safety matters. We also believe that Canadians should be free to live in their faith and speak plainly without being treated as criminals for holding traditional beliefs, and that is why Bill C-9 is wrong.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member opposite, and being of Christian faith myself, and understanding Bill C-9 to the degree that I do, I can say that there is not a member of the Liberal caucus who does not support the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of religion. There is nothing within Bill C-9 that would change what is taking place, whether it is in a faith building or a small group meeting. Nothing that is said today would be affected by the bill.

Can the member give a clear example of what he is fearful of?

Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, and as Canadians should know, the Liberals made a deal with the Bloc to garner support for the bill. The Bloc had one request: to remove the good-faith religious exemption from the Criminal Code. The Liberals said, "Sure, we'll throw them under the bus. We really don't care. We want this legislation passed. We want to be able to control speech, emotion, thought and dissent, and if it means religious freedom, we'll do that too." That is what is in the bill.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I find it very strange to hear my colleague say that there was only one request. We had a number of amendments, and we would have had more if the Conservatives had stopped filibustering and if we had been able to discuss a serious and sensitive bill like grown-ups.

That said, the Conservative member, in his speech, and even in his answer to my colleague from Winnipeg North, talked about good faith. He used the words "in good faith". How can anyone in good faith, using their religion, call for hatred, foment hatred and incite violence against specific groups, like Jews, for example, as the preacher Adil Charkaoui did a few years back during a demonstration in Montreal?

How does my colleague justify—and how does his faith justify—spreading hate through violent remarks that explicitly incite acts of violence? That is what we are talking about, and nothing else. I would like my colleague to explain whether he considers it justified to call for the alienation of a population, a specific group, under the guise of religion.

[*English*]

Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, the member is conflating many different thoughts in his question.

The minister made it very clear when he was the chairman of the committee that books in the Bible, such as Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Romans, were, in his opinion, hate language. If a pastor or a Sunday school teacher were to teach, in a good-faith way, what is written in those books, then under the removal of that particular protection in the criminal law, such an individual could be criminalized and could be prosecuted for teaching those passages.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to be in the member's beautiful province speaking about Bill C-9 with people from across Manitoba. One thing that was so clear there is that these are people who are very motivated by their faith, their religious traditions and their religious beliefs. They understand their faith to be, in totality, about a message of love. Their concern is not that they want a license to preach hate, but that they do not trust the government and other bad actors in society to weaponize this definition or the powers of Bill C-9 against them and their beliefs.

My colleague has spoken to his constituents about this. I wonder if he could share the positive role that faith and faith institutions play, as well as what would be in jeopardy if we were to take aim at religious freedom like this.

Government Orders

Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, my friend has done a phenomenal job on the justice committee of identifying the problems with Bill C-9 and defending not only the Christian faith but all faiths that would be implicated in this legislation. When I look at my community, I do not think there has been a bill or an issue that has had more correspondence directed to me, or to many members in this House on both sides, with constituents' concerns. When we look at how this could impact faith institutions, these are the institutions that began our universities, that began many of our hospitals and that continue to provide many of the social services in our communities, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting people in prison. Those primarily come out of faith institutions that are motivated by their understanding of scripture and the love of God.

Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my formal remarks, just over a week ago, an old folks' home in my riding, the Chartwell residence on 7th Avenue in Mission that is located right beside the church, burned to the ground. It was my church, St. Joseph's, that organized help for all of those displaced seniors. It was community members, the Mission Gurdwara and other faith groups that came forward and helped all those displaced residents. I want to thank all of them for standing up for what community means and helping people when they are in trouble. I want to thank all those individuals for their hard work and giving me hope for Canadian society.

Those same people in my parish who woke up in the middle of the night to help those displaced from their burning residence are the same people who are concerned about Bill C-9. I rise today thinking about the people I represent: the families in faith communities who expect Parliament to defend their freedoms and not erode them.

Bill C-9 raises serious questions about whether the government is in fact still prepared to do that. Removing the good-faith exemption from the Criminal Code was completely unnecessary. It was not what the Liberals said they were going to do. It is not what the Liberals campaigned upon. It only happened because of a political circumstance.

Removing the good-faith exemption from the Criminal Code, as I said, was completely unnecessary. The provision ensured that individuals cannot be convicted of wilful promotion of hatred if they are expressing in good faith an opinion on a religious subject or a belief based on a religious text.

These safeguards were not incidental. They were deliberately included in Canada's Criminal Code to ensure that laws remained consistent with the charter. There has been a sharp increase in hate crimes and violence in Canada. Mosques have been shot up, businesses have been vandalized, churches across our country have been burned and Jewish Canadians are facing a lot of hatred right now, which is completely unacceptable.

However, we have not reached this point due to a lack of legislation. Many parts of this bill, whether they are banning hate symbols or protecting access to places of worship, are already covered under current law. Rather, the refusal to enforce our existing laws has created a sense of security for those who actually seek to promote hate, to sow fear and to create violence in Canadian society. The answer is not to weaken fundamental freedoms for the vast majority

of Canadians who just want to go about their everyday life and go to their church or synagogue or mosque on a weekend and worship.

This is why the Conservatives today are proposing to restore the good-faith exemption to listen to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have overwhelmed Parliament with their fear of what the government is doing. Canadians of all faiths are raising legitimate concerns about the impact this decision would have.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council emphasized the “[d]isproportionate impacts on minority communities whose scriptures are more frequently politicized or scrutinized”. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops highlighted that it “risks creating uncertainty for faith communities, clergy, educators, and others who may fear that the expression of traditional moral or doctrinal teachings could be misrepresented as hate speech”.

Over the course of this debate, the government has framed these concerns as unfounded. However, comments from the Minister of Identity at the justice committee a few months ago suggesting that parts of religious texts themselves could be considered hateful and open to prosecution should give every member of the House pause, because once the state begins to interpret belief as potential criminality, we are heading down a very different path in this nation.

Faith groups in Canada are not asking for the right to spread hate. They are asking if they will still be free to speak openly about what they believe. What unites us in this country is an understanding that in a free country, people must be able to speak about their beliefs, even when others disagree, without fear of criminal prosecution.

● (1535)

One of the most troubling consequences of the amendment is the uncertainty and division it would create in our justice system and across our country. The proposed Liberal amendment claiming Bill C-9 would not infringe on freedom of expression or religious freedom offers no robust protection for charter rights. That uncertainty fosters a climate where Canadians feel they must walk on eggshells rather than engage openly and respectfully in a robust civil society. Even the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged that protections like this are essential to keeping our laws balanced and constitutional. Removing this safeguard introduces legal ambiguity and increases the risk of constitutional challenge. It also places a greater interpretive burden on courts and prosecutors without clear statutory guidance.

Government Orders

As confirmed by the Minister of Justice, these rules would also extend to digital spaces. This would significantly broaden the scope of enforcement. Without the good-faith exemption, individuals expressing religious or political views online may face increased legal uncertainty and greater exposure to investigation or prosecution. This reinforces the need for clear statutory safeguards, not their removal. Canadians are left wondering not just what they can say in a place of worship but what they can post, share or discuss online in good faith. That level of uncertainty is not healthy in a democracy and is contrary to the way Canadians have lived.

The government could have achieved every goal they set out originally in Bill C-9 without the amendment. Conservatives offered to split the bill into two parts to swiftly pass uncontroversial sections of the legislation. This approach was rejected. I hosted a town hall on this issue with my colleagues, the member for Abbotsford—South Langley and the member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, who spoke earlier, and we heard a clear and consistent sentiment.

Over the past decade, Canadians feel that the government has increasingly tried to dictate how they live and what they should believe. Canadians expected a different approach under the Prime Minister from Nepean. However, my constituents raised that, within the last year, they were afraid not only of their freedom of expression but of churches and synagogues and all religious institutions even maintaining charitable status under CRA laws. Combined with the introduction of online censorship measures, the government is continuing restrictive policies that we thought it was supposed to have rejected. Liberals did not campaign on this.

In my riding, I have one of the largest Sikh populations in Canada. Abbotsford is home to one of the first Gur Sikh temples in Canada. It is a national historic site. We are all very proud of that. Constituents have come forward to me and asked what they are going to do with their kirpan now. If a prosecutor reads in their holy book about the role of a kirpan and a sword and sees them wearing it, how will they be impacted? How will they be impacted as a member of the Sikh faith?

As other members of the Conservative caucus have raised, what will happen if someone, like the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, decides to prosecute someone for an interpretation of an Old Testament text?

The government was elected with a mandate to strengthen the economy yet, as *The Globe and Mail* reported yesterday, Canada's GDP growth has been flat for the past three quarters and remains below the G7 average. We also face an affordability crisis. Instead of working collaboratively on measures that everyone in the House could agree upon, the Liberals decided to side with the Bloc Québécois on something that is so divisive and so fearful for the average Canadian. I do not get it. This was not part of the government's mandate.

Conservatives are not even proposing to dismantle Bill C-9. We simply want to maintain the Criminal Code exemption that already exists and was never part of any political discussion during the last campaign until the Liberals felt that they were not going to get what they wanted and made a deal with the Bloc Québécois. Every member of the House agrees that hatred, violence and intimidation have

no place in Canada. Those who target individuals or communities, whether in person or online, must be held accountable under the law. The good-faith exemption has served as an important safeguard, ensuring that Canada's hate speech laws target real harm without capturing sincere expression or leaving religious texts up to interpretation from bodies outside of those religions.

At a time when Canadians are already so divided, we should not be advancing measures that deepen uncertainty or cause people to second-guess their ability to speak openly about their beliefs.

• (1540)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Joseph Neuberger, who supported the Conservative Party in the last election, is a criminal lawyer with more than 32 years of experience and the chair of the Canadian Jewish Law Association.

He wrote a very interesting story, and I recommend that the member opposite read it. It was published in the *Toronto Sun* on January 13 of this year. It contradicts a lot of the misinformation that the Conservative Party is putting out.

I truly believe that anyone who cares to listen to all sides of the discussion that is taking place knows there is nothing within Bill C-9 that is going to prevent a pastor or anyone else from being able to quote from the Bible or holy books of all different faiths. Can the member indicate where his—

• (1545)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Abbotsford.

Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, the member has used that example in good faith, and that is one single interpretation.

The justice committee has heard from hundreds, if not thousands, of people and organizations that feel that the government is going down the wrong path and that it has steered away from what it intended to do in the legislation originally to get it passed in a way that they wanted and in the time frame that they wanted, with the Bloc Québécois. As a result of that, they have sowed division and fear such that I have never seen in Canadian society before.

Why? For what reason, might I ask, did they do this? It is for political expediency.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lestiguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the only people who have anything to fear from Bill C-9 are those who want to incite hatred—so they are already doing wrong—by hiding behind their religion, using passages from the Bible, the Torah or the Quran, for example. All the bill does is remove the religious exemption. Someone who is accused of inciting hatred would not be able to hide behind a text and say that they are simply quoting it.

Government Orders

The bill includes interpretation provisions stating that, if the speech is part of a sermon and it is only reproducing a text, no charges will be laid. It has to be proven that the aim was to wilfully promote hatred.

Why does my colleague object so strongly to what has been proposed in the bill so far?

[*English*]

Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, I will say it has been great getting to know the member from Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, and playing hockey and building bridges amongst the political parties. In good faith, I really have enjoyed getting to know him. However, we do fundamentally disagree on approaches to secularism in Canada.

I will note as well that my constituents are very concerned about the context of Bill C-9 and Bill 21 from the Quebec National Assembly going before the Supreme Court. My constituents, if they were to move to Quebec and ask to work as a school teacher, would not be permitted to wear a kirpan. That is not acceptable in my version of Canada.

Chak Au (Richmond Centre—Marpole, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard from many members of Parliament today that they have received a lot of responses from a wide range of religious groups and leaders.

On the other hand, we keep hearing from the other side that people and religious leaders are being misled or are being fed misinformation, as if this is an insult or a put-down to these groups. Does my colleague want to comment on that? Is this a put-down or an insult?

Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, I think it is an insult to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are concerned right now.

The script reads like a movie. The Minister of Canadian Identity makes these comments before he is in cabinet. He erupts, people get angry all across Canada, and then the Prime Minister appoints him to cabinet. Then the Liberals make an agreement to amend Bill C-9.

Canadians are right to be concerned about the sneaky approach of the government as it relates to religious freedoms. The Liberals have been arguing throughout this debate that it would not make any difference if the provision were taken out of the Criminal Code. Then why do it in the first place?

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since I took office, my office has not received more letters, emails, phone calls or petitions on any single issue than on Bill C-9. Every day, dozens of residents in my riding call my office about the bill, and if the Liberals were honest, they would admit they are hearing the same. These families, religious leaders and ordinary Canadians are not confused. They are not misinformed. They are, however, afraid. They are afraid that the bill would chill free speech, they are afraid that it would erode religious freedom, and they are afraid that their own government is no longer listening to them.

We have seen a strong, unified voice from religious leaders of all faiths, as well as from civil liberties groups from across Canada, condemning the overreach of the bill. Organizations such as the

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the United Church of Canada, the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, among dozens of others, have raised serious concerns. In December, 23 of these organizations issued a joint statement outlining their objections to Bill C-9.

Let us be clear about something. Hate is real, it is wrong and it must be confronted, but here is the truth this government does not want to admit: Hate has festered in this country on its watch, not because we lack laws but because it has failed to enforce the laws we already have. The Criminal Code of Canada already contains clear hate speech provisions in sections 318 and 320. These cover the public and wilful incitement of hatred and the advocacy of genocide against identifiable groups, and include specific provisions addressing the wilful promotion of Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism. Canada already has the legal tools to deal with hate speech. We already have the means to prosecute those who incite violence and promote hatred. This is not a failure of legislation; it is a failure of enforcement.

Since last year, we have seen this failure first-hand. A man in Toronto was charged with an array of offences, including advocating genocide. After an eight-month anti-Semitic crime spree, he was released on bail even though he was found with multiple loaded firearms. However, the Liberals in December voted down a motion 18 times to study their own Bill C-14, which would have addressed these issues around bail. Instead of fixing enforcement, the government is doing what it always does. It is layering on more laws, more bureaucracy and more confusion, all while pretending to take action. Bill C-9 would go far beyond what is necessary. In doing so, it would put at risk two of the most fundamental freedoms we have as Canadians: freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

One of the most concerning elements of the bill is the Liberal-Bloc amendment that would remove long-standing protections for religious speech. These protections are not loopholes. They are not technicalities. They are constitutional guardrails. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada has explicitly recognized that this religious defence is necessary to keep Canada's hate speech laws constitutional because of how fundamental freedom of expression and freedom of religion are in a free and democratic society.

Let me repeat that. These protections do not exist by accident, but because, without them, the law itself risks violating the charter and the fundamental rights and freedoms we enjoy as Canadians. However, the government, working hand in hand with the Bloc, has chosen to strip them away.

Government Orders

Let me ask a simple question. If this was such a good idea, and if this is such necessary legislation, why did the Liberals not support it in 2023, when the Bloc Québécois introduced nearly identical legislation in Bill C-367? That bill also sought to remove sections 319(3)(b) and 319(3.1)(b), the very provisions that protect Canadians expressing religious views in good faith, yet from that time, I cannot find a single record of a Liberal MP standing up to champion it. There was not one.

What changed? Did the Liberals suddenly discover principle, or are they now so desperate to pass something, anything, that they are willing to abandon their own cautions and push through a bill that would divide Canadians? Bill C-9 would do more than remove protections. It would lower the threshold for prosecution, it would introduce a new, vague definition of hate, it would remove the requirement for Attorney General consent before charges are laid, and it would eliminate the religious defence. Taken together, these changes would create uncertainty where we need clarity.

• (1550)

They would make it easier for individuals to be investigated, charged and prosecuted, not for inciting violence but for expressing views that others may find controversial. This concern is not hypothetical. We heard at committee from a former Liberal justice committee chair, who stated that there is “clear hatred” in parts of religious texts like the Bible and the Torah, specifically referencing books such as Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Romans. He even doubled down and went further, saying these passages “should not be used [as] a defence” and that prosecutors should be able to proceed with charges.

Let us think about that for a moment: sacred texts held by millions of Canadians being cited as potential grounds for criminal prosecution. This is not a fringe concern. It is the natural consequence of vague and unclear legislation that will ultimately lead to a chilling of free speech and expression like we have seen in nations such as the United Kingdom.

The government says this bill will protect Canadians, but even the so-called safeguards it proposes are weak. The Liberals inserted language claiming the bill would not infringe on charter rights, yet when Conservatives proposed real, concrete protections, they rejected them. At the same time, they used procedural tactics to shut down debate. They cut off discussion. They limited scrutiny. In doing so, they shut out the voices of Canadians, including those most directly affected and concerned by this bill.

Conservatives offered a reasonable solution and a clear path forward: Split the bill and swiftly pass the uncontroversial sections. However, the Liberals rejected this and took the easy way out, bundling the good with the bad and forcing it through, teaming up with the Bloc to undermine freedom of expression and religious freedom. The justice minister has also confirmed that the bill would apply to online content, which raises serious concerns about the direction Canada is heading. We have already seen attempts by the government to regulate online speech through legislation like the former online harms act. Now we see another step in that same direction, toward a system where Canadians may begin to self-censor out of fear. That is chilling, not because they intend harm but because they are unsure where the line is.

This bill is not about filling gaps in the law. It is about covering up failures: failures to enforce existing laws, failures to lead and failures to act when it actually matters. Instead of fixing these failures, the government is trying to mask them with sweeping new legislation that goes too far. Hate speech is wrong, but Canada already has the tools to deal with it. What we do not need is a law that risks punishing the very freedoms that define us. I will stand with the Canadians who have written to me. I will stand with faith communities across the country, and Conservatives will stand for the fundamental freedoms that Canadians expect us to defend. For those reasons, I cannot and I will not support Bill C-9.

• (1555)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we just have this ongoing misinformation here in the House of Commons. The purpose of the combatting hate act is to protect vulnerable communities from what we are seeing on the ground in municipalities across the country, such as acts of growing anti-Semitism, intimidation and targeted harassment, and white supremacist rallies on the streets, with hate symbols and the enacting of acts of hate in public.

What organizations or individuals is the member opposite referring to who are advocating to commit hate crimes in the name of their religion? Who?

David Bexte: Mr. Speaker, I suppose I appreciate the question from the member opposite, but such as it is, I do not know of any organizations that I affiliate with that are advocating for hate speech and trying hate speech. The religious organizations I have spoken to, including the United Church, the Catholic bishops and many other pastors and congregations in my riding are absolutely chilled. They are absolutely chilled by the prospect of where this can go, considering the history of the failure to execute by the government on so many different files.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hear the Conservatives’ rhetoric. I also see it circulating on social media. The Conservatives are spreading misinformation about the Bloc’s position, and I find that quite unfortunate.

The only thing the Bloc wants is for it to be illegal to use religion to promote hatred. Ultimately, we want to prevent crime from being committed in the name of religion, crimes that could have catastrophic, even fatal, repercussions on the lives of innocent people.

Points of Order

Can the Conservatives respect the Bloc's position, which was put forward in an amendment and which, at the end of the day, is simply common sense?

[English]

David Bexte: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. It attempts to drive at some clarity as to motivation, but the Bloc is the sponsor of that amendment. It would have, and would continue to have, a chilling effect on these faith groups across the country. The government does not have a good record with respect to restraining itself from overreach as its ideologues and ideologies evolve through time according to the whims of the current polls. The current government will find the temptation irreversible to encroach upon the limits of the constitutionality of this legislation.

• (1600)

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of Christian groups. I am a Christian myself, and Christians across the country are concerned about this overreach, as the member just said. We have seen recent examples of government overreach as recently as four years ago, when the government invoked the Emergencies Act. I do not believe we can trust the current government with respect to restraining its authority, especially when a sitting minister says that biblical texts could possibly be implicated in this legislation.

I just would ask the member a simple question. We have the Bible here in its entirety for a reason. We believe in it. Does the member believe the Bible in its entirety or the interpretation by the current minister for Canadian heritage?

David Bexte: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the member from across the way, the Liberal heritage minister, that the Liberals would feel restrained in any way at all. This would simply embolden them to silence dissent, silence opinions that are opposed to theirs and further divide Canadian society. I appreciate the question from my colleague.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will actually say this as a practising Christian. When they quote one part of the Bible, particularly Leviticus, where they go back and say, "It is not good to commit adultery, but it is okay if it is your slave girl," there are some sections pulled out by themselves that one would not regard as inspirational or as the word of God. Let me just get that out of the way.

The point of Bill C-9, which the hon. member for Bow River put so well and which I believe is the core of the problem, is the uncertainty it would create. That is why I am voting against it. We need certainty. If we are going to fight hate crimes, the Criminal Code already provides us with the tools.

David Bexte: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the chilling impact of self-censoring goes directly to what the problem is with all of this. The entire population could be subject at different times to exactly that, and that is frightening.

POINTS OF ORDER

AMENDMENTS TO BILL C-8

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to raise a point of order respecting three amendments that were adopted in a committee during clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-8, an act respecting cybersecurity, amending the Telecommunications Act and making consequential amendments to other acts.

The three amendments include CPC-2, CPC-5 and CPC-15. When these amendments were moved at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, the chair ruled these three amendments out of order. The report respecting the bill was tabled in the House on March 11. I submit that the committee, in adopting these three amendments, exceeded the scope of the bill, which was determined by the second reading vote on October 3, 2025.

Page 649 of the fourth edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at section 16.74, sets the limitation of amendments moved in committee to a bill that is adopted after second reading. This limitation, which deals with the scope and principle of the bill, states:

An amendment to a bill that was referred to a committee after second reading is out of order if it is beyond the scope and principle of the bill.

In each of the aforementioned three amendments, the chair of the committee ruled CPC-2, CPC-5 and CPC-15 inadmissible because they would be proposed concepts that go beyond the scope of the bill. The CPC challenged the ruling of the chair for each of these amendments. The Bloc supported overturning the decision of the chair, and these three amendments were adopted.

Now that the bill is back before the House, I would request that the Speaker review the bill as amended and decide whether the amendments proposed through CPC-2, CPC-5 and CPC-15 exceed the scope and the principle of Bill C-8. Should this be the case, I would request that the Speaker order that the bill be reprinted without the offending amendments for the House's consideration at report stage.

• (1605)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I see two points of order. I have the hon. member for Ponoka—Didsbury and then I will go to the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The hon. member for Ponoka—Didsbury.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives would like to reserve the privilege of responding to the parliamentary secretary's point of order.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I do not think I have seen this before, so perhaps the hon. parliamentary secretary, at some point later in debate, or the Speaker can answer the question I have.

Government Orders

Is it at all normal that we would have a point of order to review amendments after committee work has closed on Bill C-8 to ask if it is within scope? Those questions are usually taken up at the moment when the amendments are brought forward. The clerk of the committee and the chair of the committee judge whether the amendment proposed is within scope.

I know retroactivity seems to be a big thing these days, and we just passed Bill C-4, which came into effect 26 years ago, but I question the validity of this point of order.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): We will wait for more information from other members who want to intervene. The chair will take this under advisement and report back to the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke.

* * *

COMBATTING HATE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the kind-hearted, loving people who cannot be censored from Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke to speak to Bill C-9, an act to fuel hate.

The Liberals claim that their motivation is to combat hate. The hate Canadians have witnessed in our streets is real. The Liberal commitment to fighting it is fake.

Canada was stitched together by people of different faiths, speaking different languages. We have been a country of diversity and inclusion ever since Sir John A. Macdonald began the decolonization of British North America. Our forebears did this with a single thread that ties us together: Every person is equal under the law.

That promise was not realized immediately for everyone, but over time, we strengthened our social fabric to protect everyone's right to be treated equally under the law. Hate became less common in Canada, and then 10 years ago, a radical ideology broke free from the confines of socialist echo chambers and spread across the Internet like a virus. This ideology has worn many labels, such as wokeness, cultural Marxism and American critical race theory. The most accurate description is illiberal progressivism. Really, it is just another form of socialism that devalues the individual and valorizes a social group.

This ideology demands that we treat people differently under the law, based on their race, gender or religion. Its adherents hijacked our culture's aversion to intolerance and declared that anyone who disagreed with the ideology was a racist and a hateful bigot. This cowed many progressive Liberals into silence. For the more ideologically free mercenaries in the Liberal Party, this was an opportunity.

They would fund this ideology to build an activist network they could harness and attack their political opponents with. They hired these activists to build ideological enforcement units throughout the

public service. That is how we ended up with a lunatic and anti-Semite getting a federal contract to provide diversity training.

Now they are being hoisted on their own racist petard. They have lost the ability to condemn and call out regular hate marches through neighbourhoods where Jewish Canadians live. They claim this bill is intended to stop the hate marches. We already have the laws we need to do that.

Ontario's minister of justice wrote to the police and told them to enforce the law. The police responded by saying when they do, the Crown prosecutors drop the charges. The Crowns claim they cannot bring cases which do not have a reasonable chance of conviction. The reason they cannot get a judge to convict a masked thug marching with the Hamas flag is that the Liberals have spent 10 years appointing judges who are committed only to upholding the racial, socialist ideology that treats criminals as marginalized victims of a racist society.

The Liberals thought they could exploit the woke, but once they brought this ideology inside, it spread throughout their party. It has changed them. Under Chrétien and Martin, the Liberals were divided between red and blue, left and centre, and then Trudeau swept in and kicked out the old guard. The character of the Liberal Party changed. It adopted a pinko hue.

We need only look at the rhetoric of the Liberals over the last decade. Here are five quotes. The first is, "The opposition party has no plan other than to let the planet burn." The second is, "Their only answer to climate change is to ignore it and to let the planet burn. This is immoral." The third is, "Some men just want to watch the world burn." The fourth is, "They are going to let the planet burn, and they are going to force us to pay for it." The fifth is, "They can enjoy their 10 hours in the car and let the planet burn." Four of those quotes are from the mouths of Liberal members in the last Parliament. One is from a Batman movie.

It is not enough for the Liberals to say they disagree with our approach to lowering emissions globally by exporting more natural gas to replace coal. No. They have to paint us as supervillains from a comic book, bent on global destruction. If we check the official record, we will see they only started calling us evil, immoral supervillains once they brought a self-described "proud socialist" into their caucus.

This type of rhetoric has just one purpose: to spread hate against their political opponents. Now they want to team up with the separatists to further tear Canada apart by scaring people into silence. Removing the religious text exemption to the hate laws has just one purpose: to instill fear.

Government Orders

• (1610)

This narrow legal defence has never been used. It is not the obstacle to enforcing the hate laws. The only reason to remove it is to make it even easier for the radical socialists to attack and silence those Canadians they see as enemies standing in the way of their utopian fantasy. Rapists and hit men are walking out of court scot-free, but Liberals want preachers and rabbis to watch what they say. This is not some hypothetical concern.

Earlier, I spoke about how the Liberals used tax dollars to build an activist network. One group funded by this network is the anti-Canadian hate network. These activists mix reporting on dangerous neo-Nazi groups with reporting on a pro-life group in my riding. They do not even pretend to report on anything that is hate-related. Their last post targeting my constituents was about a board of directors' dispute.

This is a government-funded attempt to shut down the scope of debate. The goal is to expand the list of topics that are off limits for debate in a tolerant, small "l" liberal democracy. This is why they equate opposition to socialist climate policies with Holocaust denialism. This is why granola-crunching, Birkenstock-wearing, anti-vax hippies were rebranded as far right insurgents. This is why any criticism of the World Economic Forum gets one labelled an anti-Semite. This is why they will fine people \$750,000 for not believing a man in a dress is actually a woman. That is why Bill C-9 now removes the religious text defence. The new race socialists cannot win the debate using facts or logic, so they seek to silence all opposition.

I mentioned two types of Liberals. There are those who are cowed into silently supporting an illiberal agenda, and then there are the ideologically free mercenaries. Earlier today, I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Justice why hate crimes surged under the Liberal government. His only answer was to claim it was outrageous to hold a government accountable for its policies. As the minister who flip-flopped on spending time with his family when the polls improved, I think we can place him in the ideologically free camp. This is how he could cut a deal with the radical secularists who want an independent Quebec, free of anyone wearing a crucifix or a hijab. He is cutting this deal while asking the Supreme Court to kill Quebec's secularism law by editing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to include an asterisk beside section 35.

He has twisted any principles he had into a pretzel to pass this bill, and for what? The bill duplicates existing law. It is already a criminal offence to disrupt or obstruct a religious service. Giving a concurrent sentence for a hate-motivated crime is literally just a virtue signal. Nobody will spend an extra day in prison. All that is left is to remove the very safeguards that make any hate speech law workable under the charter. By removing these safeguards, all it might take is an overzealous Crown attorney to bring a case so egregious that the entire hate speech law is deemed unconstitutional. This is not something anyone should want.

We want a robust culture of free speech and debate. We can draw the line at Klan burning rallies, tiki torch goose-stepping marches and Hamas rallies in Jewish communities. By taking away the safeguards which allow us to distinguish clear-cut cases of hate from overwrought claims by woke warriors, the Liberals risk our ability

to make those distinctions. For them, it might not be a bug, but a feature. As long as it serves their political interest to equate any opposition to Liberal rule with hate, we will see more hate. As long as the per capita GDP declines and the government sends an explicit message that access to support or employment is determined by skin colour, we will see more hate.

The fact that the minister who broke our immigration system is now in charge of our justice system is scary. He turned our country into a tinderbox and now, with this bill, he wants to play with matches. He claims to care about social cohesion while passing a bill that acts like a solvent. He is pouring turpentine on the glue that holds the country together and the thread that binds us, which is that every Canadian is equal under the law.

• (1615)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some days I do not even know where to start, given the string of conspiracy theories. I am learning so much about this whole other world that most of Canada and most of the world has no idea even exists. It is a whole other language that apparently people need to be plugged into the freedom convoy network to even understand. We have heard about activist networks, ideological enforcement units, radical socialist judges, pinko blue Liberals, utopian fantasies of rapists and hitmen and the World Economic Forum, with some anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans hate sprinkled in just for good measure.

Does the member actually care about freedom of expression or just freedom to do whatever she wants?

Scott Anderson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the member across the aisle said there were anti-LGBTQ things in the speech. I did not hear any such thing at all. I would like him to retract that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I think we are going into a matter of debate at this point. I will just ask all members to listen to the speaker who is about to take the floor.

I will go to the hon. member for Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke for her response.

Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, that question illustrated my point. I have a point of view that the member disagrees with, so what does he do? He calls me out as a racist and somebody who is fomenting hate, alleging that we are the ones introducing all these different cultures into Canada.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am glad I was here for my colleague's speech. It was surreal. The fact is, we were treated to some name calling and all sorts of veiled insults. My colleague across the aisle listed some of them. It was very entertaining.

The member talked about radical secularists, radical separatists and radical socialists. One would think we were listening to Donald Trump or one of his buffoons talking about one of his political opponents. Apparently, we are extremists simply because we speak out and we disagree with my colleague. First of all, I find it hard to take this seriously and to believe that the member's opinion and her speech have the Conservative Party's support. It makes no sense.

Which is more extreme? Is it the person who is so obsessed with their religious beliefs that they are incapable of seeing and interpreting any nuances or of explaining the subtleties of a bill with any discernment, or is it the people who critique the bill and want to debate it openly?

[*English*]

Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, there again we heard from someone who does not agree with my seeing a certain bill as overly secular. Instead of just debating the point, the member equated me to the President of the United States.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through this debate we have come to understand very clearly that we do not need more hate speech law. We already have mechanisms in place in Canada that protect us from hate speech. This is just a redundant matter that the Liberals keep bringing up over and over again. We do not need it. Whenever we say something the Liberals do not agree with, they go to their playbook and say we are misogynist, sexist, racist or homophobic. That seems to be their typical playbook.

Could the hon. member just explain very quickly, very concisely, why we are opposed to this bill?

• (1620)

Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the questions and the comments from the opposition clearly illustrate why we are opposed to this bill. People who disagree with what we say or our point of view want us to be accused of committing a hate crime. Just saying what we think, even though it is counter to what they think, does not necessarily mean it is an act of hate. We were here when the original hate law was put into place. We were very careful about how we constructed that. The problem is not with the definition of hate. The problem is the enforcement of what is already on the books.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a pastor in my riding named Al Stone, who is actually in Ottawa this week for the National Prayer Breakfast. Pastor Stone wrote a very heartfelt letter about Bill C-9. He said that in his decades in the church, he has never heard a preacher read from the books, even the ones that the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture said were hateful, and do so from a place of hate. They have done it from a place of love. However, the Liberal government does not respect that fundamental religious freedom or free expression.

The member for Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke has been in the House for a long time. When did this become such a crisis that no Liberals will stand up for free speech?

Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, it began in 2015. As the woke agenda and everything else rolled out, it became extreme, so I would say 2016 is when it began.

Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what kind of society and what kind of country do we want to be?

Is it one where the government has the power to decide what we can or cannot say, to decide what religious texts we can or cannot read and which opinions we can or cannot hear, or do we want to be a country where citizens are allowed to express themselves freely without fear of persecution or intimidation from the state, where citizens are allowed to voice their opinions, speak their truths and engage in robust political debate, and where we recognize that the price of free speech includes having to occasionally hear things that we disagree with, that are distasteful, that are repugnant and that at times may even contain hate?

That is the price of free speech, is it not? That is the price of denying government the power to regulate the words we speak and, I should say, that is the price of free speech in Canada today.

In years and generations past, the price paid to protect this fundamental freedom was much greater, measured not in courtrooms, in parliamentary committees or even on the floor of this House but measured on battlefields around the world by the blood spilled and lives lost to defend it. The question of whether to sacrifice some of our freedom to feel more secure and more comfortable is a question as old at least as western civilization itself, but it represents a false choice. Our security, our unity and our strength of spirit as a nation exist not in spite of our freedom but because of it, and attempts by some to erode that for the benefit and glee of others who would regulate, intimidate and control are misguided and wrong.

Over the last 10 years, Liberal governments have consistently introduced legislation that is part of a trend in our country, a trend of increasing the influence of those who would wield the wand of censorship and empowering those who seek to control what we think by controlling what we can see and discuss online. It is a trend of consistently undermining the free expression of individual Canadians and attempting to stifle and socially engineer public debate, whether it was with the former Liberal Bill C-11, which decided the government, in its infinite wisdom, should have the power to manipulate the algorithms and the search results of YouTube, Facebook and other social media companies and thereby influence the information that we see and consume, or the former Bill C-63, which attempted to further criminalize and regulate speech.

Government Orders

Now we have before the House Liberal Bill C-9, a bill that, as originally presented, would have watered down the definition of hate speech and removed important guardrails to reckless and politically motivated prosecutions. It is a bill that, at its very core, would make it easier for the government and any future government to prosecute and jail Canadians based not on their actions but on their words, and make it easier for individuals in positions of authority to wield that power as a tool of intimidation to scare those with minority or unpopular views to seek the safety of self-censorship or else risk the wrath of the almighty state.

While at committee, thanks to the determination and perseverance of a handful of Conservative MPs, we were able to remove many of the most dangerous and shameful elements from the legislation. Another new alarming amendment was added. In a deal struck between the Liberals and separatist Bloc Québécois, it was agreed to remove a provision from the existing Criminal Code that prevented the prosecution of Canadians for expressing in good faith the beliefs or words of ancient religious texts, opening the door to politically motivated prosecutions on the basis of religious expression and belief, and in so doing compromising not one but two of Canadians' fundamental charter rights.

To think that in a country where free speech and freedom of religion serve as two of the foundational principles and values, the bedrock on which this nation is built, a government would seek to criminalize the expression of sincerely held religious beliefs and to criminalize the reading of certain religious texts just seems so outrageous, so absurd and so fundamentally un-Canadian.

• (1625)

This is not an exaggeration. The Liberal chair of the justice committee at the time literally singled out specific passages from both the Christian Bible and Jewish Torah, declaring them hateful in the context of further criminalizing religious speech. Beyond the obvious issues with infringing on the charter rights of Canadians, there is another issue. It is that this bill ignores, deflects and distracts from the very real and the very same challenges in Canada today that it purports to address.

There is an issue in this country with some trying to hide behind the charter right of free expression to genuinely incite violence, but that is already illegal. There is an issue in our country with some attempting to intimidate and obstruct those seeking to practice and exercise their faith, but that too is already illegal. There is an issue in this country of repeat violent offenders assaulting or otherwise harming those for little or no apparent reason, some of which is undoubtedly motivated by hate.

The government's response has been to repeatedly weaken Canada's justice system over the past 10 years and to refuse to aggressively pursue those guilty of breaking Canada's existing laws today, focusing not on those causing immeasurable physical harm in our cities and our streets, but on redirecting finite police resources to chase down ill-defined crimes of speech and on redeploying officers from our communities and towns to Internet message boards, Facebook posts and tweets.

In the last 10 years, under the Liberal government, violent crime in Canada has increased by 50%. Homicides are up by 27%, and more than a third of these murders have been committed by known

offenders on some sort of judicial release. This is the direct result of Liberal bills like Bill C-5 and Bill C-75, which have made our communities increasingly less safe by prioritizing the release of violent offenders and by weakening sentences for serious crimes.

If the Liberal government actually cares about the safety and security of Canadians, it should start by fixing the problem it helped create, not by targeting the fundamental charter rights of Canadians, not by making it easier to prosecute speech and not by going after those for expressing sincerely held religious beliefs.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for those that might be following the debate to at least be aware of the fact that we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees religious freedom. Every member of the chamber is very familiar with that. At the end of the day, when I look at motivation, I question why the Conservative Party continues to promote fear amongst those who attend or participate in whatever way in our faith communities. It all boils down to the self-serving Conservative Party. That is the opposition. That is the reason why the party sends out thousands of emails requesting money and donations and asking to build a databank.

Could the member be straightforward and indicate why the Conservatives are—

• (1630)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Aaron Gunn: Mr. Speaker, I know it might be hard for my hon. colleague across the way to understand this, but those of us on this side have deeply committed beliefs when it comes to charter rights, free speech and free expression. We are not making a political calculation. This comes down to a simple question: Do we want to live in a country where the government has the right to decide what we can or cannot say, or do we want to live in a country that, despite the fact that people might say things that we disagree with or find disgusting or even hateful, we still defend to the death the right of those individuals to say it?

I know the type of country I want to live in. I wish my colleague across the way wanted to live in the same.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lestiguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question I have for my colleague is this. Do we want to live in a country where people can incite hatred and use religious text as an excuse to get off scot-free?

Government Orders

[English]

Aaron Gunn: Mr. Speaker, further to the point that I just made, the choice is a simple one. As soon as we start placing these restrictions on free speech and free expression, the question becomes who gets to define where the limits are. Where do we draw the line on what we can or cannot say?

The bill proposes that it is the government that would have the right to look over its citizenry and decide how we are allowed to freely express ourselves. I believe that is a God-given right that rests with every single Canadian, and no government should have the right to control the words that come out of our mouths.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for that excellent speech and for reminding us all that free speech is something we need to protect. Members on this side of the House do not believe it is a political talking point. These are deeply, truly held beliefs on this side of the House.

Could my colleague explain, in very simple terms for those who are watching this today, why the Conservatives want to repeal the bill or to stop it from happening?

Aaron Gunn: Mr. Speaker, it is simply because Conservatives on this side of the House believe in free speech. We believe in free expression, and we believe in freedom of religion. These are the foundational values and principles on which our entire country, the entirety of western civilization, was based upon. Once we start ceding that authority to government, we allow government to control what we can or cannot say.

Who gets to draw the line? Who gets to decide what is or is not permitted or is not hateful? That is not the foundation of a free country. That is a slippery slope to a tyrannical regime.

[Translation]

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was not expecting to participate in this debate today, but I think it is essential. In my life, I have been a victim of hatred because of unchecked speech. I have been subjected to rape, I have been subjected to physical harm, I have been subjected to all sorts of things.

Freedom of speech does not mean anyone can say whatever they want. It is important that we establish standards and set boundaries. This has nothing to do with faith. I would really like to understand what my colleague would do in a situation like mine. We need measures in place to protect Canadians. I am an example, and there may be women among the Conservatives who have gone through this.

• (1635)

[English]

Aaron Gunn: Mr. Speaker, over the past 10 years, we have seen violent crime on our streets increase dramatically under the Liberal government. That is an issue that needs to be addressed, and it is not a surge in speech crimes that needs to be dealt with. It is the fact that the government keeps releasing repeat violent offenders back onto our streets over and over again, such as those who assault people and commit all sorts of other serious crimes. One-third of murders committed are by people on release. This is a distraction, and it undermines a foundational constitutional principle.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Industry; the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, Carbon Pricing; the hon. member for Oxford, The Economy.

[English]

Carol Anstey (Long Range Mountains, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill C-9 and, more particularly, to the deeply concerning and controversial Liberal-Bloc amendment that would remove the long-standing good-faith religious defence. This amendment would restrict freedom of expression and freedom of religion in Canada. My opposition to this legislation is not rooted in just my interpretation of this legislation; my concern is shared widely and consistently by faith communities right across the country.

I want to expand on this point just for a moment because I have sat in the House for almost a year, and it is extremely frustrating when the members opposite claim misinformation when Canadians are pushing back against the policy decisions of the government. When we are doing exactly what we were elected to do, they accuse us of being negative or of talking down Canadians. However, the truth is that Conservatives are the only ones standing up for Canadians on this issue and on many others that are concerning to them.

The opposition to this amendment is coming from a wide range of religious organizations that are united on this issue. When that happens, all members should feel a deep sense of responsibility to listen to them. I would suggest that the Liberals, even if they do not want to listen to us, should pay attention to the fact that, while different faith communities do not agree on many things, they are united on this issue. In addition, I would like to point out that the Liberals would likely be more aware of these deep concerns if they had taken the time to consult with different faith communities on this amendment, but they did not. They did not call one witness to speak to it.

Ever since this amendment was introduced at committee, I have received an incredible volume of responses to this issue, including hundreds of signatures on petitions and numerous emails, phone calls and personal messages. Faith leaders are reaching out to their congregants, advising them of the seriousness of this legislation and educating them about the potential consequences.

I want to take this opportunity to read a couple of the messages that have been sent to my office on this legislation.

One person wrote, “I am writing to formally and unequivocally oppose Bill C-9, the so-called anti-hate legislation.

“Bill C-9 infringes on free expression and free speech, which are foundational rights in democratic society. The bill introduces vague and subjective standards that chill lawful speech, empower government overreach, and risk punishing Canadians for opinions, criticism, or debate that fall outside politically approved boundaries.

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“Hate crimes are already illegal and under existing law. Bill C-9 does not close the gap. It expands state power into speech regulation, lowers threshold for punishment, and invites abuse through interpretation rather than clear, objective harm.

“Free speech does not exist to protect popular or uncomfortable opinions. It exists precisely to protect speech that is controversial, dissenting or critical of those in power. Bill C-9 moves Canada in the opposite direction.

“I expect my Member of Parliament to reject Bill C-9 in its entirety and to defend the Charter rights of Canadians rather than erode them....

“Bill C-9 should be withdrawn.”

Here is another one: “I urge you to please vote ‘NO’ to the upcoming Bill C-9. I am very skeptical of the current government’s understanding and definition of ‘hatred’ and ‘hate speech’. It is my sincerest fear that this bill will allow law-abiding citizens to be charged with ‘hate crimes’ for sharing or voicing unpopular beliefs or convictions on social and political issues. This has happened in other supposedly democratic and ‘free’ Western countries.

“This censorship is not democratic and endangers our country’s constitutionally guaranteed freedom of belief and expression. As a duly elected representative, I ask you to please vote against Bill C-9. Furthermore, I urge the other six Newfoundland and Labrador representatives, regardless of their political affiliation, to also vote NO to this harmful legislation.”

These are messages from people who are genuinely concerned about the direction of this legislation, and there are many more.

I have heard from constituents not just from my riding, but also from Canadians living in Portugal Cove; Mount Pearl; North West River, Labrador; Flat Bay; Conception Bay South and St. John’s. They are people who feel that their voices are not being reflected by the government that represents them. Instead of listening, the government has done the opposite. It has used procedural tactics to shut down debate on this bill, cutting off discussion and shutting out the voices of countless Canadians, particularly Canadians of faith who have been writing and calling members of Parliament, urging us to reject Bill C-9. The government should be listening on this issue.

• (1640)

This is not about defending hate. Calls to incite violence or hatred are already illegal in Canada, and they should be. Nothing in the existing religious defence protects that kind of conduct. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that the religious defence plays an essential role in keeping our hate speech laws constitutional because of how fundamental freedom of expression and freedom of religion are in our system.

I also want to point out something that Canadians have consistently reminded me of, and it points to why they are so untrusting of the Liberal government when it comes to their faith. They talk about how the government imposed a values test on the Canada summer jobs program, requiring faith-based organizations to attest to positions that conflicted with their deeply held beliefs in order to access funding. They bring up discussions about removing charita-

ble status from organizations engaged in the advancement of religion. They feel that there has been an attack on their faith by the Liberal government. When the government members now say to trust them, that this is not going to compromise Canadians’ freedom of expression or of religion, they do not trust them.

Conservatives proposed a reasonable path forward. We offered to split the bill, to pass the uncontroversial provisions quickly, while allowing proper study and debate on the more controversial elements. The government rejected that proposal. Instead, Liberals chose to move forward with the full bill rather than take the time to get it right. They also introduced language claiming that the bill would not infringe on freedom of expression or religion, but that language offers no real protection. When Conservatives proposed stronger safeguards to protect charter rights, those efforts were rejected.

I want to reiterate something I mentioned earlier. This is not the Conservatives incorrectly interpreting the legislation or opposing just for the sake of opposing. I want to take a minute to reiterate some of the groups that have been vocal about opposing the legislation, and this is not an exhaustive list: the Anglican Church of Canada, the United Church of Canada, the Christian Legal Fellowship, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the National Council of Canadian Muslims. This is a cross-section of Canadian society, yet despite all of this, the government continues to double down and push forward.

Conservatives want to know why the government is not pulling back in the face of this opposition. Why continue down this path after hearing from Canadians right across the country, including in their own ridings? Why shut down debate instead of allowing it? Why not spend time conducting meaningful consultation on the amendment instead of shutting it down?

Before I close, I want to point out that there are several faith leaders and people of faith right here in Ottawa for the National Prayer Breakfast. They have taken their time and their resources to be here to pray for our nation. The government should respect their widely held concerns and walk back on the legislation. If Canadians have concerns, the government should listen.

I would also like to point out that, in Newfoundland and Labrador, our faith groups provide services to single moms. They give children Christmas when their families cannot afford it. They run the food banks. They feed the seniors. They are an extremely important part of our communities.

I would like to reiterate the words of my pastor, who said that we, as a faith community, have helped our government in helping society as a whole. From our single moms group and support for those battling addictions to aid for medical emergencies and the children and youth ministry, the church helps to close the gap for those in need. Our government should respect the work of the church and try not to hinder it by removing this protection.

As a person of faith myself, this is extremely important to me. The government is pushing back on an amendment that compromises our beliefs and our teachings. Governments have no place to tell Canadians what they should or should not believe. This is precisely why the amendment raises such concern. Even the perception of legal risk creates a chilling effect. Over time it erodes the freedom that defines us.

In closing, I urge the House to listen to Canadians, restore the good-faith religious defence and protect Canadians, so we do not undermine the freedom that unites us.

● (1645)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the record, the bill was introduced over six months ago. It spent over 33 hours of debate in committee. The Conservatives have just engaged, in that entire time, in a country-wide campaign of misinformation and grift. At its core, the bill codifies the definition of hatred as extreme detestation or vilification, and a hate crime as a public incitement of hate or hate against an identifiable group. This would clarify the law. It would provide clearer tools for law enforcement, so my question to the member opposite is this: What religious organization, what faith, is advocating for hate crimes on behalf of their members?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I will note that there was a word in there that would be considered unparliamentary, so I will just ask the member not to do that again.

The hon. member for Long Range Mountains.

Carol Anstey: Mr. Speaker, I will make a couple of comments. I was following the legislation very closely, and there are just a couple of things. When the amendment was passed, they did not consult with any faith groups or faith organizations. They did not call one witness. In addition, I will add that, if the member was listening to my speech, he would have heard me say that there are already laws in place. This is not scripture wrapped up after inciting violence. That is already illegal in this country, so his comments are not relevant.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the start of this debate, I have been wondering whether there are any concrete examples of religious discourse by a pastor, a minister or a rabbi, or any texts or contexts that might cause issues.

For example, I recall a Conservative MP questioning me about a previous Bloc proposal to remove this religious exemption. He told me that his pastor would no longer be allowed to speak out against homosexuals. Does his pastor call for members of the LGBTQ community to be murdered? If so, he should find another pastor.

I would like to know whether my colleague has examples like that. It might shed some light on the hateful remarks made by pas-

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tors, imams and rabbis that would require us to maintain legal protection so that they can continue to spread hateful content. Otherwise, I do not understand why the Conservatives would oppose removing the religious exemption.

[*English*]

Carol Anstey: Mr. Speaker, several religious faith-based organizations have spoken out about this piece of legislation. Inciting violence is already illegal, and faith teachings are spoken in love, not hatred. His question is precisely the reason the legislation needs to be walked back. It is because it can be taken out of context and people of faith understand that when pastors and teachers are speaking about scripture, they are speaking about it in love, not in hatred, which is already illegal in this country.

Jonathan Rowe (Terra Nova—The Peninsulas, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I often hear Liberals in this House and across the country say that there should be separation of church and state, and that is their argument for this terrible bill. I am wondering if the member for Long Range Mountains could expand on that and how she feels there should be separation of church and state.

● (1650)

Carol Anstey: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we are pushing against the legislation. It is because there is a respect for this perspective about separation of church and state, and in this case, the government would be infringing on religious freedoms, which is actually our attempt to protect the church. The government is coming over into our lane and religious organizations are pushing back as a result, so we are actually respecting the separation of church and state.

Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I believe in a free, democratic Canada. I believe in a country where people can speak their minds, practise their faith and engage in open debate without fear of punishment from their government. That is why I am deeply concerned about Bill C-9.

I recently held a town hall in my city, with the help of my colleague from Elgin—St. Thomas—London South. Usually, these town halls see maybe 50 or 100 people. That evening, over 600 people from my riding and others showed up. These are not fringe voices. Many were religious thought leaders from established Christian and other denominations, some were officials from other levels of government and all were thoughtful, engaged citizens deeply concerned about what they see as an assault on civil liberties. That level of concern should make all of us pause.

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This is not about defending hate. Hate should be condemned. Where it crosses into violence or incitement, we already have those laws, and we need to enforce them instead of making more of them. This bill would expand government power over speech, and whenever government takes more power in this area, we know it is not coming back. Intent matters, and I do not doubt for a second that the framers of this bill had good intentions. The original bill contained provisions that many of us would support, but at committee, the Liberal Party accepted a Bloc amendment to remove the religious exemption. That is a hard no from this side of the House, and I believe from many other Canadians.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not treat religion as an afterthought or something to be bargained away in committee. Freedom of religion is listed among our fundamental freedoms because that freedom to hold beliefs, to express them and to live them out is foundational to human dignity. For decades, Canadian law has reflected this through a religious exemption in hate speech provisions. That exemption ensures Canadians can cite scripture, preach, teach, debate and discuss matters of faith, even when those teachings are controversial, without fear of criminal prosecution. Bill C-9 would remove that protection.

Religious expression is a charter-protected freedom. Let us think about what that means. Expressing a traditional religious teaching, something that has been part of faith for generations, could now be interpreted as criminal, depending on how someone else perceives it. The old adage that the road to hell is paved with good intentions is not just a saying. It is on full display here. The government may mean no harm and the next government may mean no harm, but we do not know the future and what future governments may plan. What we do know is that if Bill C-9 passes, future governments will have the tools they need to legally repress Canadians by simply redefining “hate” to mean whatever they say. That does not mean they necessarily will, but it was not that long ago that the Liberal government accused anti-government protesters of hate and invoked the Emergencies Act. It is not a long walk to imagine future misuse of that term.

This brings us to another major issue: the definition of “hate” in this bill. The bill describes “hate” as detestation or vilification, stronger than dislike or disdain, but what does that actually mean? Who decides what qualifies as detestation? Who determines when strong disagreement becomes criminal speech? It is not voters or Parliament. It is unelected officials, police, prosecutors and courts making subjective judgments about tone, intent and interpretation. That should concern all of us, every single Canadian. Once the state begins policing subjective thresholds in speech, it creates uncertainty, and uncertainty leads to a chilling effect. People begin to self-censor. They avoid difficult conversations, they stay silent rather than risk investigation or complaint, and that silence weakens democracy. If the exemption is removed, many clergy, imams, rabbis, elders and faith leaders will feel compelled to self-censor, not because they promote hatred but because the line between controversial and criminal becomes very blurred.

Think of everyday faith community life: sermons, youth programs, marriage preparation classes, theological debates and small group discussions. In all of these settings, people discuss difficult moral questions. Without the exemption, these conversations could

be misinterpreted or taken out of context, leading to complaints or investigation. A law that intimidates people out of participating in their own faith tradition is not protecting freedom but chilling it.

• (1655)

Another troubling aspect of this bill is how it would be enforced. It would rely heavily on a complaint-based system. That means investigations could be triggered not by clear violations, but by complaints, by perception. In today's world, especially online, context is easily lost and disagreement is constant. Do we really want a system where a social media post can lead to police knocking on our door? Do we want a country where people fear that what they said months ago in the heat of an argument could suddenly bring police to their door?

I do not like the “frog in the pot” analogy because it tends to smack of conspiracy theory. This analogy, as we know, says that if we put a frog in a pot of cold water and turn on the heat the frog will not notice the water getting warmer until it is boiling and it is way too late. However, many Canadians feel that negative change is happening gradually, bit by bit. They see rising crime, economic strain and increasing government reach into everyday life. They see their firearms being confiscated and the Emergencies Act misused. They see bank accounts frozen and their jobs disappearing. If they manage to succeed, they are demonized and called greedy. Now they feel that their deepest beliefs may be taken away. Their concern is real and should not be simply dismissed.

Perhaps the most serious issue is the precedent that it sets, that the state can determine which religious beliefs are acceptable and which are criminally suspect. A government should never be in the business of judging which scripture passages are allowed or which doctrines may be taught. I thought western society was over that in the 16th century. Once that door is reopened, it becomes easier for future governments to go further. Today's controversial belief may become tomorrow's punishable offence. It is one thing to uphold the separation of church and state, but it is another to allow the state to define “acceptable church”.

We all want a country that is safe, respectable and just, but safety cannot come at the cost of freedom. The issue is not whether we oppose hate; we all do. Bill C-9 introduces ambiguity where we need clarity. It removes protections where we need safeguards. It shifts power away from Canadians toward institutions that are not directly accountable to them.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I look at Bill C-9, I see a holistic bill that is a reflection of a campaign commitment less than a year ago by the Prime Minister and the government of the day. What we are seeing is a genuine, substantial change to ensure there is a proactive approach dealing with hate laws there to protect the victims of hate crimes. It is substantial. The Conservative Party wants to twist it around and talk about one issue, that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of religion.

Does the Conservative Party support other aspects of the legislation or is the member in complete opposition to the legislation, Bill C-9, on combatting hate?

Scott Anderson: I think the Conservatives have been very clear about this. We are opposed to the removal of the religious exemption, which was never a campaign promise made by the Liberals at any point. At no point in the campaign were we told they were going to remove religious exemptions from Canadians.

The laws already exist. I cannot think of an offence that this particular bill covers that is not already covered in the Criminal Code.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. We obviously wish him a speedy recovery from his cold.

I would like to hear his thoughts on the situation. My colleague said that it is not up to the state to determine which religion is the right one. However, when people use religion as a pretext to commit violent, serious or deadly crimes, or when they incite hatred by hiding behind that pretext in order to be acquitted or get reduced sentences, is it not the state's responsibility to intervene and change the law so that people can no longer hide behind religious pretexts to incite hatred?

[English]

Scott Anderson: Mr. Speaker, when somebody uses religion as a pretext to commit a crime, they go to jail. They would go to jail now, before the bill is passed. We do not need the bill to make them go to jail. There is no precedent for doing this at all. I reject the question.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee for his fantastic speech and for hosting an amazing town hall in Vernon, which I had the great privilege of presiding over with him. Over 600 people from B.C.'s beautiful Okanagan came out, because they reject what the Liberals are trying to do with Bill C-9.

The member had, rather infamously now, spoken about how a few Liberals had invited him to cross the floor. I think his stand for

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free speech disqualifies him from joining their ranks, given the contempt that the Liberals have shown, through Bill C-9 and other bills, towards religious freedom and freedom of expression. The member understands full well that the bill is not the only attempt by the Liberals, and not the first attempt by the Liberals, to erode long-standing protections for religious speech. We have seen this through the online harms bill and through the Online Streaming Act. We have seen it, to some extent, in the Online News Act.

The member has approached this issue rather interestingly. He is not just focused on religious freedom. He has talked about the importance of freedom of expression in general, and I am hoping he can elaborate on that.

Scott Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I have been called a religious maniac and all the usual terms that come from across the floor many times, despite the fact that I think I have gone to church three or four times in the last 10 years and always on Christmas eve. I am not a religious maniac.

I am very concerned about the curbs on free speech that the bill contains. It is crucial to democracy that we hear all opinions. We cannot form opinions without hearing all of those opinions. Sometimes they are controversial. Sometimes they are not controversial. Personally, I am against all forms of censorship, because I feel that society itself polices this very well. I find free speech to be an absolutely crucial element to democracy. We cannot have democracy unless we have a reasonable amount of free speech.

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak to Bill C-9, a piece of legislation that has brought forward huge concerns for Canadians of every religious background across the country.

Canadians I speak with in my community are not asking for more censorship. They are asking for safer streets, stronger communities and a government that focuses on real problems. Instead of focusing on these concerns, the Liberal government has chosen to prioritize Bill C-9, a bill that targets some of the most fundamental charter freedoms we have as Canadians: freedom of speech and the freedom to practise our faith. That choice matters because it tells Canadians what the government values and what it is willing to put aside.

Let us take a step back and clearly understand what this bill would actually do. Under the current Criminal Code, there is a narrow and carefully constructed safeguard. Section 319 allows individuals to express, in good faith, opinions on religious subjects or based on a belief in religious texts. It is for all persons of faith, be they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh. This safeguard is not broad. It is not a loophole and it is not a free pass. It applies only to one specific offence. It does not apply to violence. It does not apply to threats or incitement. These actions are already illegal, and they should be. There is no charter right to hate or to act hatefully.

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Even the Supreme Court has recognized that this safeguard is necessary to maintain the constitutionality of Canada's hate speech laws. It exists to ensure that we strike the right balance between protecting people from harm and preserving the freedoms that define us as a democratic society.

Bill C-9 would remove that safeguard. That is where the problem begins, because when that protection is removed, uncertainty is introduced into the law. A situation is created where Canadians could face criminal consequences for expressing sincerely held beliefs grounded in their faith, not because they are promoting violence or because they are attacking an individual, but because those beliefs may be interpreted by the state as crossing a line that this Parliament is choosing to make unclear. That should concern every Canadian, regardless of what they believe or if they do not believe in any religion at all. It is about whether the government should have the authority to decide which beliefs are acceptable and which are not.

We often hear the Liberals point to extreme examples to justify this bill. They talk about hate. They talk about violence. They talk about incitement. However, what they do not say is that all of those things are already illegal. There is no protection in Canadian law for violence. There is no protection for incitement.

Experts who testified before the committee confirmed this. Legal experts, witnesses and practitioners all made it clear that the current law for hate crimes already addresses the scenarios the government keeps raising. When these examples are used to justify this bill, they are not identifying a gap. They are describing conduct that is already criminal. If those laws are not being enforced, then the issue is not the law but enforcement.

However, instead of addressing enforcement, the government is choosing to expand its power over speech. That is a very different conversation, because now we are no longer talking about protecting Canadians from harm. We are talking about regulating what Canadians can say and what they can believe. We are not talking about extremists hiding behind religion to justify harm. This is already illegal, and there are no protections for that under current law.

We are talking about ordinary Canadians: pastors delivering sermons, rabbis teaching scripture, imams guiding their communities, parents teaching their children values rooted in their faith and traditions, and educators discussing religious texts in classrooms. They are the ones who would feel the impact of this change, not the people who seek to sow hate.

● (1705)

I have heard these concerns directly from members of my community. Earlier this year, I met with more than 30 local faith leaders, alongside my colleague from Elgin—St. Thomas—London South. He is a member of the justice committee and has studied this bill extensively. No one in that meeting was seeking to promote hate. They only brought forward concerns that this bill creates uncertainty around what they are allowed to say, teach and share with their own religious communities.

They wanted me to tell this story to all the MPs in Parliament because they are scared that quoting a religious text could be legally misinterpreted. They are worried that the law is moving in a direc-

tion so that they can no longer speak freely without fear of consequences. When we hear that directly from people affected, it becomes very clear that this bill is not as straightforward as the Liberal government claims.

That concern has also been echoed by organizations across the country. There are not many pieces of legislation that would unite the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, the World Sikh Organization of Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Centre for Free Expression, and Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East. From left and right, these organizations agree that we should not proceed with Bill C-9 in its current form.

In a free society, people should not have to second-guess whether expressing their beliefs would lead to legal consequences. They should not have to weigh their words against the risk of prosecution simply for speaking openly about their faith. This is Canada. Even if prosecutions are rare, the fear alone changes behaviours. It silences people. It discourages open discussion. It weakens the very foundation of a pluralistic society, and that is not something we should take lightly.

Again, we have to ask what problem this bill would solve. It certainly is not addressing a gap in the law. Instead, it is removing a protection. At the same time, the government is choosing not to focus on the issues Canadians are actually worried about.

Across the country, communities are dealing with the consequences of a broken bail system. Police chiefs have raised concerns. Provinces have raised concerns. Municipalities have raised concerns. Canadians have raised concerns. They are seeing repeat offenders released out onto the streets, sometimes within hours, only to reoffend. That is the reality. That is what people are living with. Instead of prioritizing meaningful reform to address this problem, the government is focused on regulating what Canadians can say and what they can believe.

This bill would not make Canadians safer from acts of hate. The bill would shift attention away from the real public safety issues and toward the regulation of speech. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion are not optional in a free society. They are foundational. They protect the ability to disagree. They protect the ability to question. They protect the ability to hold beliefs that may not always be popular. Once the state begins to decide which beliefs are acceptable, those freedoms become conditional. They become dependent on the approval of those in power. That is not what Canadians expect, and that is not the direction we should be heading.

I will leave my Liberal colleagues with this: If the law already makes violence illegal, if the law already prohibits incitement and calls for genocide, and if experts have confirmed there is no gap that requires this change, then why is the government so determined to remove a safeguard that protects peaceful, good-faith religious expression? More importantly, why is the government choosing to focus on regulating belief instead of fixing the real problems that Canadians are facing in their communities every single day?

• (1710)

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now, the streets are full of murderers, rapists, thieves, extortionists and gang violence.

How would this bill fight what is currently the scourge on our streets? Could the Liberals have not spent this time on jail, not bail, instead of wasting our time by blocking freedom of speech?

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, I think this is the question running through the mind of just about every MP of the House, on both sides of the aisle, I am sure, because this is attacking religion, freedom of speech and democracy. Right now, people in our communities are afraid to walk down the street. They are afraid to go shopping. There are elderly people afraid of break-ins at their home. That is what we should be focusing on.

Why is the government ramming this through? There is no clear explanation.

• (1715)

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was excellent. I have been here most of the day, listening to a number of interventions by the Liberals, particularly the member for Winnipeg North. He sounds like a broken record. He has been able to identify one lawyer in Toronto who actually supports the removal of the religious defence. I have listened to the member over a number of days, and that is the only example he can cite.

Given that this was never the intention of the Liberal government when it introduced Bill C-9 in Parliament and that it was clearly done in the middle of a review of Bill C-9, what does the member think about why now the government is unable to articulate the real reason it is supporting the Bloc amendment?

Helena Konanz: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think this is a question running through everyone's mind.

I wonder what the members on the other side of the aisle are thinking. They must be getting the phone calls I am getting. They must be getting the emails, the written letters and the calls from their local faith leaders who are completely against this because, as I mentioned earlier, they are afraid of what they might say in their next sermon or what they might write in the next column for the newspaper. Parents are afraid of what they might discuss with their children.

It is baffling why the Liberals would be pushing this through so quickly, and it is actually shameful.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Holy Bible, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Quran and

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the Torah are holy scriptures, and there are others. There is the Hindu community, and there are many different places of worship. There is nothing in Bill C-9 that would take away from what is taking place today in these places of faith. Members know that.

Does the member support the motivation of the Conservatives to raise money on this issue? For example, I will quote a Conservative fundraising letter, which says, “[The] goal is to expose people of faith to criminal prosecution.” It also says, “The Liberals are waging a war on religious freedom” and “The Liberals are—”

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member has been asking the same question over and over today. If he does not have anything new to add to the debate, maybe he should let somebody else take the floor, because nobody else seems to want to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Order. We do have rules about relevance and repetition, but I will let the member complete his question in about three seconds and then allow the member to answer.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not appreciate the interruption.

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member across the aisle for the question he has asked many times today.

I would like to ask the member why the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Muslim Public Affairs Council, the World Sikh Organization of Canada, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Centre for Free Expression and Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East are against this. Many of the member's constituents are against this, I am sure.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Why don't you come debate it with me in Winnipeg North?

An hon. member: I'll take that challenge.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I probably should not have heckled, but I did say, “Why don't you come to Winnipeg North?”

I would like to withdraw that, but I am happy the Conservative critic said he would take me up on it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): That is not really a point of order. I will let members dictate their agenda in another venue. I thank members for their co-operation.

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member for Winnipeg North would hush down, I would be more than happy to intercede on the amendments at report stage of Bill C-9.

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As I previously stood up during debate on the closure motion on Bill C-9, I want to reiterate that here we have a government that is bringing in a bill and amendments under the guise of hate speech that are actually an attack on our civil liberties and on our charter freedom of religion. We know that the Liberals are now censoring debate by bringing this closure motion. We only get today in the House on Bill C-9 amendments, and then they are forcing us to vote. They are going to force the bill to a final vote on Wednesday.

This is just the modus operandi of the Liberals. When they want to ram something through, when they want to creep into our lives and erode our civil liberties, they bring in closure, they force a vote and they get their way at the end of the day. That is not democracy. That is not parliamentary procedure. It undermines our country and the freedoms we enjoy.

We know that Bill C-9 came in to address the issues of the imam in Montreal, Adil Charkaoui, who said on October 28, 2023, that he denounced all Zionist aggressors, and he called on Allah to kill the enemies of the people of Gaza and spare none of them.

That in itself comes down to anti-Semitism. It was hate. He should have been charged for it, but the RCMP and the investigators decided they were not going to charge him. They did not believe, because there was reasonable doubt, that there was enough evidence to proceed to charge him under sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits public incitement to hatred against anyone, and identifiable groups. He used the term “Zionist”, and that is not really religious, but we know he was talking about the Jewish people. It is despicable that he would even suggest that.

Christina Van Geyn wrote an opinion piece in the National Post that states, “One may argue that ‘Zionist’ was just code for ‘Jews.’...But the decision not to charge Charkaoui turned on the basic threshold of incitement to hatred, not on the religious defence.”

The problem the Liberals have in this situation is that it was the prosecutors and the RCMP who decided not to investigate, rather than addressing the real issue of going after it, instead of bringing in Bill C-9, which is just a ruse to undermine our civil liberties, including freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of expression.

We asked the government to split Bill C-9 into two parts. There are sections in the bill we do want to support, because we all want to stop hate speech. We want to stop the crime that is taking place around this country. Again, though, the Liberals are just ramming this through.

In the dying hours at the justice committee when it was studying Bill C-9 in its original form, the former chair of the committee, who is now the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture, the member of Parliament for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, stated from the chair, using his prerogative, “As despicable and as unlawful as the statements made by Mr. Charkaoui are”, and he said that maybe they needed to go into the good-faith argument a bit more. Then he stated, “In Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Romans, there are passages with clear hatred.... Clearly, there are situations in these texts where statements are hateful. They should not be used to invoke...or be a defence.”

That is when, all of a sudden, we got this amendment out of nowhere that would take away from the Criminal Code the religious exemptions to ensure protection for those people who are at the pulpit reading the ancient texts, scripture from the Bible, the Torah and the Quran. Now the Liberals are saying they are hateful and should not be allowed.

The Liberals are trying to make the argument that they are still protected under the charter. However, decisions made by the Supreme Court over the last 30 or 40 years have said clearly that the guardrails we need with respect to protection of the religious freedoms embedded in the Criminal Code under paragraphs 319(3) (b) and 319(3.1)(b) are required.

The sections they want to take away state, and it is the same in both paragraphs, that “No person shall be convicted of an offence under subsection (2.1)”, which is hate crime speech, “if, in good faith, [the person] expressed or attempted to establish by an argument an opinion on a religious subject or an opinion based on a belief in a religious text”.

● (1720)

They would be removing that, and they are trying to say, “Do not worry about it. It is all still going to be protected under the charter.” It would not be. As I said before, this is being led by the person who is now the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture. He is supposed to be protecting Canadian culture, which includes freedom of religion. He, backed by the Liberal cabinet, the Liberal caucus and the Bloc, is trying to take away the religious freedoms that we have and the exemptions that are granted to protect, particularly, pastors, imams and rabbis who are actually reading and quoting from the Bible, the Koran, the Torah and other religious texts.

There is now a list of almost every religious group and organization in Canada that is opposed to Bill C-9. However, the Liberals say that we should not worry because they are protected under the charter, but they are not.

Again, this is a violation of the concept of separation of church and state, which is about keeping government and religion separate from each other. Now the government is trying to step in, and instead of being agnostic as to what faith people want to choose or not choose in Canada, it is now starting to wiggle its way in, inserting the thin edge of the wedge to again divide Canadians on another issue, saying that the church is going to have to take the rules imposed by the government, the state of Canada, on our religious institutions.

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Even though we do not have a single law, like other countries have, that says we will separate church and state, there is good reason why we should always keep that separation and the government should not be allowed to dictate what is going to be preached from the pulpit. We do not want to restart what happened under Henry VIII in 1534, when he did not like what the church was saying so he took over the church. He created the Church of England, and today the Crown is still the head of that church.

We also do not want to go down the route of the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China, where religion is outlawed, but that is exactly what the government is starting to walk towards. Even though it may be saying it is officially agnostic, or, as in the case of the Communist Party of China, saying that it is officially atheist, what the government is really trying to do is pick the winners and losers and is trying to quash anyone who does not subscribe to its ideology.

When we were in government, we started the office of religious freedom. Stephen Harper said at that time that “governments that violate religious freedom are also prone to impose themselves in every other sphere of life.”

We talk about how the Liberals continue to weigh in on the issues, and this is not the first time they have started to dictate how the government wants churches and other religious groups, the synagogues the mosques and other temples, to behave. We witnessed this five or six years ago when they brought in the attestation for the Canada summer jobs program. They said that if someone was preaching certain beliefs from the pulpit, like the protection life, they could not do that or they would not be getting any government money. That was challenged and was walked back the following year.

Now the Liberals are trying to actually take away the Criminal Code section that protects what we say from the pulpit and ensures that it cannot be used against us in a court of law. I would just remind the House what the Charter of Rights and Freedoms says. In the very preamble, it says, “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law”. In section 2 the charter says, “Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression”.

This is supported in Supreme Court cases, not the charter, but Criminal Code paragraphs 319(3)(b) and 319(3.1)(b). Both the Supreme Court cases of *Big M Drug Mart* and of *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay, the city*, say that religious neutrality must be maintained and that the government cannot favour or hinder any of that belief.

Everybody should be voting against Bill C-9. Everyone of faith should be very concerned about what the Liberals are trying to do to religious freedom in Canada.

• (1725)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say at the beginning that I am very pleased that the Conservative critic is actually going to come to Winnipeg North. I will take him up on that challenge for a public debate. I will look at

Sisler High School, or maybe Maples Collegiate. We will see what we can arrange.

Having said that, my question for the member of the opposition is, can he explain to Canadians why the Conservative Party has attempted to raise money using this issue? The Conservatives are literally sending out tens of thousands of emails to get people fearful with the misinformation they are pumping out. I will give an example. They are saying, “They are trying to push laws that could criminalize passages”, and, “The Liberals and Bloc want to prosecute people for quoting scripture.”

Why is the Conservative Party misusing its privileges?

• (1730)

James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am looking forward to the match between the member for Winnipeg North and the shadow minister of justice. My money is on the member for Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, and I am laying it down. It is going to be no contest. I can see the member for Winnipeg North screaming “uncle” halfway through the first round. I am very much looking forward to it.

The Liberals are using every play in their little dirty book of procedure to try to shut down debate in the House. They are trying to undermine our democratic right to come in here to speak and represent all Canadians, and they are busy trying to attack religious freedom across this country.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it has been said in the House by a number of us, the volume of emails and phone calls we have been receiving from people urging us to oppose Bill C-9 is astronomical. I have one in front of me from a man named Brandon. He said removing the religious defence creates serious concerns for Canadians of any and all faiths and religions who believe the freedom to teach and practise their religion in good faith should remain clearly protected.

That man lives in Winnipeg North, but he did not feel like his call would fall on anything but deaf ears with the member across the way, so he reached out to us, and I am very grateful for that.

My colleague from Manitoba has heard these same messages. What stands out to him about what Canadians think about the government and its priorities on freedom of expression, or the lack thereof?

James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from London for the hard work he has been doing in talking to Canadians across this country to ensure that they understand what is happening in the House.

When I talk to constituents and people from across the province, they are not aware of Bill C-9. If we were not out there speaking about it and if we were not out there communicating via email and social media, and making sure that we were posting online, they would not know about it. That is the only way for people to understand that their religious freedom and civil liberties are eroding because of the Liberals.

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The great danger in any country is when a government starts to take small bites out of our civil liberties. At the end of it, we are left with nothing.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, and I appreciate him acknowledging that Canadians need to pay attention to this debate.

It is interesting, because Canadians should know that the debate we are currently having in the House is on the removal of a short title. Constituents within the riding of Waterloo would want to know what was so appalling about the short title that the Conservatives chose to remove the reasoned amendment they had put on notice, which members were prepared to debate. This morning, the Conservative House leader came in, removed the reasoned amendment that the Conservatives had supposedly put thought and process into, and chose to replace that substantial debate with one on removing the short title.

I would like to hear from the member what was so wrong with the reasoned amendment that we are debating the removal of a short title.

James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, that was dealt with through unanimous consent, but we are not debating just the short title. That has been dealt with. What we are talking about is how the Liberals, on page two, would repeal paragraph 319(3)(b) of the Criminal Code—

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Maybe it would be suitable for us to be reminded of what the debate taking place right now is on. Clearly, that—

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. It is a matter of debate. Actually, it is very easy to look at the screens in the chamber, which say what the debate is about.

I will let the member finish in 12 seconds or less.

James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that clarification from the member for Waterloo, because we are talking about report stage. We are talking about the amendments that were made, and that it is repealing section 319(3.1) and 3(b) of the act, which is the area that provides—

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley.

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour and a privilege to rise on behalf of the great people of southwest and west central Saskatchewan. Before I begin though, I just want to give a quick shout-out to my daughter's U13 girls' hockey team. The Colts had a great series against the girls from the Big River First Nation Rangers. My daughter's team was victorious this time, two games to one. I want to commend all the parents and all the fans who came down from Big River for game three on Sunday as well. It is a very long trek from there, so I do appreciate them putting the effort to come on in and support their team. It is a great team. We look forward to a series against Moose Jaw, just down the highway, to find out who are the consolation bracket winners of the U13 girls' hockey league in Saskatchewan. We are not playing for the

championship, but it does not matter. There are games to be played, and we hope they win.

Today, we are debating yet another Liberal censorship bill, Bill C-9. Sadly, this is not the first time we have had to fight against censorship from government overreach by these Liberals. Considering that this new threat of censorship is directed against religious groups, it means we are getting to something that deeply affects people's lives. We need to be clear about what we have in mind if there are going to be changes to the law removing protection for people's views of religion or spirituality.

Faith shapes the world view and conscience of both individuals and communities that seek to live their lives accordingly. In this way, faith is more than an accessory or disposable part of people's lives. Too often, that is how some people who might be non-religious and do not have personal experience in this area try to reduce it down. There is a lot more involved than outward participation in social activities, cultural practices or celebrating holidays. For the believer, faith is an essential part of living their life publicly and privately, and it is a matter of personal integrity. This seems to be what the government is trampling over. It is bringing in a censorship bill, and while doing so, it is shutting down our debate to rush it through.

Even though the government is trying to silence Canadians and stop debate, I am honoured to be able to speak to Bill C-9 and bring a voice to the many people who have reached out to my office to express their deep concerns and frustrations with the Liberal government and its continued efforts to divide the Canadian public and achieve its political goal, which is ultimately to rule over every group and institution of this vast country.

I would like to go back to the foundations of this very country. Sir Samuel Tilley, who was one of the founding fathers of the Confederation, was reading his Bible back in 1864. He was reading from Psalm 72, which is known for verse 8, which states, "May he rule from sea to sea, [and] the river to the ends of the earth." This passage, of course, is the inspiration for the inscription on the Peace Tower, which says, "He shall have dominion...from sea to sea."

This is not written about the Prime Minister having dominion as much as he would like it to be. No, it is about King David who wrote it about his son Solomon, who was the incoming king, but it is widely regarded as being written about God's kingdom on earth. This is about recognizing that God has dominion over Canada. It is God who blesses this country. It is God who appoints rulers and leaders, and yes, even Liberal ones. If we uphold this idea, we will realize that this means there is a higher source of truth and goodness standing above human governments that frequently go astray. Otherwise, we are left alone to suffer under those who are powerful on earth, trying to abuse their power to control, exploit and impose their agenda on vulnerable people.

Psalm 72 ends with verses 18 and 19, which say:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David, son of Jesse are ended.

When Canada created its own coat of arms in 1921, there are Latin words that are inscribed on the bottom of it. I am not going to try to cite them because I will say it very wrong. I do not want to do that. Those Latin words mean dominion from sea to sea, which is a tip of the cap to Psalm 72 once again. Along with our motto, government documents officially refer to our country as the dominion of Canada, making a clear connection with the original verse from scripture, but the Liberals started to neglect this title. Eventually, the first Trudeau made a point of erasing it after changing the Constitution.

The founders and builders of Canada recognized that our nation would be built on biblical values and that God would be the cornerstone of our nation.

John Diefenbaker, the great former prime minister from Saskatchewan, famously said:

I am Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship God in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I [think is] wrong, free to choose those who [shall] govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

He made that statement, and he passed the Canadian Bill of Rights long before the charter came along. He clearly understood the close relationship between freedom and faith, which helps us understand that God is the source of our human dignity and rights.

• (1740)

It is because of that that we know there are moral absolutes and we have learned how to clearly choose right from wrong. Even people who are not from a faith background recognize that respecting human rights does not depend on human opinions or the views of dictators and tyrants.

Following Diefenbaker, Lester Pearson's preferred flag for Canada had two blue bars on either side of the red maple leaf. These blue bars also represented from sea to sea, which would have been a public display and recognition, once again, that God has dominion from sea to sea. Even though the sidebars are red, I would argue that it still stands for the dominion of God from sea to sea over Canada.

The charter that the Liberals love to pretend to support begins:

Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law:

Do colleagues know who worked to create that document and whose signature is down at the bottom? It was none other than Pierre Elliott Trudeau, yet with the way things are going today, he probably would not be Liberal enough for the current government, which has somehow become even more radical than the government was back then.

Since the Liberal government has been in power, it has done everything to erase and eliminate its founding principles. Colleagues who do not agree with me should just look at its track record. One of the more famous anti-Christian policies that was put in place was for organizations to affirm the radical left Liberal viewpoint with the Canada summer job attestation. It was a values test, and it was an attack on many summer camps, food banks and other community organizations because they might happen to have a different moral value set than the Liberal government. Despite the uproar

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and push back from many organizations and groups, this ridiculous policy, which has no benefit to hiring summer students, remained.

The government's treatment of faith-based organizations under its far left, death cult MAID regime forced a hospice to close. A place taking care of elderly people on their deathbeds was forced to close because it chose to uphold the dignity and value of life, in accordance with the very values that this country was founded on, rather than offer death.

Then there are the constant threats of the Liberals to revoke the charitable status of faith-based organizations. There are many organizations that work to provide clothing, food, diapers and supplies to vulnerable mothers who are pregnant or have newborn babies, yet the Liberals have repeatedly campaigned on an ideological crusade to shut these places down because of their religious or moral beliefs. They work to attack parental rights when they pass a law with an overly broad definition that would criminalize conversations with their children or raising their family according to their religious values.

There are many other examples from the government that have led to an erosion of trust by Canadians. Worse yet, it has given social licence for thugs and anti-Semitic people to terrorize places of worship, day cares and schools for simply being Jewish organizations. Then there are the church burnings. Over 120 churches have been burned in the last five years without a single objection from the government.

The Liberals' anti-faith agenda has spilled over to the police not pressing charges and prosecution not proceeding. Clearly, they have never been serious about fighting crimes like this or dealing with the riots. Instead, they are trying to score points with problematic bills, such as Bill C-9.

It was the former chair of the justice committee, before he was put back in cabinet, who made some troubling remarks about the Bible. While working to remove an exemption for good-faith religious belief, he said:

I don't understand how the concept of good faith could be invoked if someone were literally invoking a passage from, in this case, the Bible, though there are other religious texts that say the same thing [and] somehow [say that] in good faith? Clearly, there are situations in these texts where statements are hateful.

Ironically, he expressed his own interpretation of the Bible and apparently wants to have that worked into the law. He clearly does not understand that people who follow biblical teaching are not hateful and that they actually believe in loving everyone. Besides that, how else are we supposed to understand that? Clearly, in this case, he suggested that what Christians believe is hateful and should be something that should be legally prosecuted.

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Despite the strong concerns of many churches, as well as other religious groups, are we really supposed to leave it to the Minister of Justice's assurances that we should just trust him? That would mean ignoring what his fellow minister said about the Bible, and that is not a responsible way to write laws in what is supposed to be a free country.

With another Liberal censorship bill, Bill C-11 we saw a previous heritage minister flip-flop on whether the government would require licensing for media and journalists. Canadians cannot trust the Liberal government to get this right, and that is why we stand opposed to this bill here today.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member had a point of order earlier. He was concerned about the same old members asking questions, and he really wanted a question from the MP for Waterloo, so here I am asking a question on behalf of constituents from the riding of Waterloo, who think this is important legislation. I agree.

We have received many emails regarding this legislation from all sides. It is a true diversity of perspectives. They know it is an important debate to have. There was a question posed about a reasoned amendment that was placed on notice. Rather than debating that reasoned amendment, the Conservative House leader came in this morning and changed the debate. Now we are debating the removal of the short title. The Conservatives are suggesting that that is not the debate, but that is the debate that we are having.

I would like to hear from the member what he has against the short title and why we are not debating the reasoned amendment.

● (1745)

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, we are here to debate some of the amendments to the bill. We are not debating the actual short title. I just want to get that clear.

I have received many emails from my constituents, just like the member has, and every single email I have received has said to please vote against this terrible piece of legislation. They have made it abundantly clear that is what they want to do, and so I am happy to be able to stand hopefully later today and later this week to vote against this bill.

I thank the member for standing up and having somebody other than the member for Winnipeg North asking a question. I appreciate her bringing something different to this debate today.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lestiguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on the two interpretive provisions that were added to the bill in order to address certain concerns. Here is what is clearly stated in one of those provisions:

...nothing in subsection 319(2) or (2.2) of the Criminal Code shall be construed as prohibiting a person from communicating a statement on a matter of public interest, including an educational, religious, political or scientific statement made in the course of a discussion, publication or debate, if they do not wilfully promote hatred against an identifiable group by communicating the statement.

Does that not reassure my colleague?

[*English*]

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate any of the language that was added through the committee phase to try to make this terrible bill less bad. I am appreciative of that amendment.

The problem still remains that we have a government that continues to attack faith-based communities. When we see legislation like this, as I alluded to in my speech, it gives social licence to thugs to target synagogues, churches and schools. We just saw in the newspaper yesterday that another church was burned to the ground, and nothing is being done about this.

Conservatives have tried to move other motions and introduce bills to try to protect those churches, but we see the government vote against them. It is about the signal that the government is sending to people, and that is why people are united in their opposition of what the government is trying to do with Bill C-9.

Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague did a great job of highlighting the Christian heritage of Parliament in Canada and the dominion from sea to sea and the many references that are in this place.

I have been hearing from Christians across the country who know me, Christians in my own church, about the threats of Bill C-9 to freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

What is the consensus in Canada around Bill C-9? Is it a threat to freedom of speech and freedom of religion in Canada?

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, yes, absolutely. Overwhelmingly, the people of Canada are opposed to what the government is trying to do with this. People recognize that it historically has been the case, and today it still continues to be the case, that churches provide a lot of the much-needed social assistance for people.

Anything that the government is going to do to make life more difficult for those churches is going to be very problematic. Any faith-based organization that might be criminalized because of something they might say or because of a belief they hold, because of the text in the Bible or of any other religious text, is going to restrict their ability to offer services to people, which is going to be problematic. It is going to be Canadians, particularly vulnerable Canadians, who are going to lose out from that. This is on top of all the racket, rioting and violence we are seeing on the streets that nothing is being done about because these guys over here on the other side of the aisle just do not seem to care about getting things right.

Mel Arnold (Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in this House as the elected representative for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies, a part of this country that is known for its significant place and time in Canadian history. Craigellachie in the middle of the Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies is the place where in 1885 the last spike was driven on the Canadian Pacific Railway, uniting this country from coast to coast to coast. I mention this because it was a time when Canadians were united across this country because of a vision of a Conservative leader and a willing private sector. It was a time of great building and of great accomplishments, not a time of division.

I want to put this question to all Canadians who are listening out there. What would be more concerning than a Liberal government promoting a bill that would remove the exemption that ensures that clergy of any faith would not be found guilty for quoting religious books like the Bible, the Torah or the Quran? What is more concerning is the Liberal government's introducing this programming motion that would limit the debate in this House and limit the ability for Canadians to have influence on how and what legislation gets passed that would continue and control their futures. The Liberals have abused their powers to limit debate, limiting word changes and limiting amendments. Even reading of amendments being voted on was not permitted at committee.

This has amounted to the Liberals' censoring debate of a censorship bill. They have used their parliamentary strong arm to shut down debate with respect to Bill C-9, shutting down our voices as members of this House representing the voices of millions of Canadians of faith who have sent letters and submitted countless petitions all against what the Liberals would do in Bill C-9 and calling on the government to reject Bill C-9.

Prior to the amendments put forward by the Bloc and supported by the Liberals, clergy were exempted from being charged with hate speech for simply quoting texts in holy books. Changes in Bill C-9, such as the removal of the religious defence for wilfully promoting hate, would make it easier for people to be prosecuted for expressing sincerely held religious and political views, and would create ambiguity in a law where clarity is needed now more than ever. As Conservatives, we believe that hate is real and must be addressed, but it has festered under the current Liberal government.

The divisions in Canada have never before reached the point where they are now, after 10 years and more of Liberal government and the divisive policies of the current government. Canada already has bans on hate symbols and for obstructing access to a house of worship, making parts of Bill C-9 redundant. In fact, Conservative members offered to split Bill C-9 into two parts to swiftly pass the uncontentious sections of the legislation, but the Liberals rejected this. They took the easy way out by teaming up with the Bloc to attack freedom of expression and religious freedom. This bill and this debate are not about whether faith leaders should be free to spread hate; no one should be allowed to do that. They are about how hate is defined and how the law is applied.

On December 9, 2025, at the justice committee, the Liberals and the Bloc voted to remove Criminal Code paragraphs 319(3)(b) and paragraph 319(3.1)(b), which say that individuals cannot be prosecuted for wilful promotion of hatred if they are expressing “in good

faith....an argument or opinion on a religious subject or...based on a belief in a religious text”.

• (1750)

This is the troublesome part of this version of Bill C-9, which the Liberals are now pushing through with their programming motion. 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 now removes. Religious communities, including the Jewish community, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists, hold a vast range of beliefs on religion, morality, sexuality, politics and culture. Though some may find these beliefs objectionable, old-fashioned or even hateful, a free country does not criminalize expression of sincere religious beliefs.

What is also really troubling in the bill is that the former justice committee chair said in committee on October 31 that there was “clear hatred” in some books of the Bible and Torah, singling out Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Romans.

The minister said:

Clearly, there are situations in these texts where statements are hateful. They should not be used to invoke...or be a defence.

He said that prosecutors should be able to press charges. He meant pressing charges for someone quoting sacred text.

The Supreme Court has recognized the religious defence as necessary to keep Canada's hate speech laws constitutional, because of how crucial freedom of expression and freedom of religion are.

The Liberals have tried to restrict what people can say through numerous pieces of legislation, including the online harms act, Bill C-63 in the previous Parliament, which they have committed to reintroducing in this Parliament.

We have seen, for over 10 years, that they simply cannot be trusted to draft legislation that is in the best interests of Canadian freedoms. In fact, they are still not accepting the court ruling that they actually broke the law when they invoked the Emergencies Act.

If there is one thing I have learned in my 10-plus years in the House, it is that when the Liberals say to trust them, it is time to take a closer look at what they are saying. They have repeatedly shut down debate and even gone as far as shutting down Parliament when they were caught pushing ideological agendas that were not in the best interests of Canadians.

I mentioned earlier the time when the country was united by a railway and a vision of leadership. Unfortunately, over the past 10 years, now going on 11, we are seeing a country that is divided by Liberal ideologies and a lack of hope for what the country could be.

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We do see them picking up some of the best Conservative policies and platform ideas, but too often those policies and platform ideas are watered down to the point of irrelevance or blocked by existing Liberal laws. I can only caution Canadians, and especially the Liberal government, against trying to limit the freedoms of Canadians. That is what our veterans fought for, our freedoms in this country, and I urge all Canadians to do all we can to maintain the freedoms that we have here in Canada.

• (1755)

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout this discussion this afternoon, I have been trying to understand what the Conservative objection to the combatting hate act actually is. The best I can tell is that they are asking for freedom from accountability, basically. In the bill, hate is defined as detestation or vilification. We have seen white nationalist rallies, public symbols of hate, the growth of white supremacist clubs, the diminishment of reproductive rights for women, anti-abortion hate, hate against women, hate against LGBTQ individuals, hate against trans individuals, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia—

• (1800)

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Not only is the member delving into misinformation, but he is saying things that will bring the House into disorder, by saying things that are patently untrue. He should withdraw and apologize. It is disgusting.

The Deputy Speaker: I was listening to what the member was saying, and I have not heard anything that was unparliamentary so far in his statement. I will let the member finish his questions and comments.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is rising on the same point of order.

Hon. Darren Fisher: Mr. Speaker, I also heard some comment on the other side saying, “You are a disgrace,” to the member. I would ask that they also, whoever said that, retract that statement, because it is unparliamentary.

The Deputy Speaker: I am just going to take a moment with the clerks, so I can get clarity on something because I did not hear everything that was being said. There were so many members speaking while I was trying to listen to the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. Members will give me a moment.

I am going to remind all members to be judicious. There is a standing order, Standing Order 18. It is a rule of the House. There is no equivocation with it. I invite all members to delve into it. Standing Order 18 is very clear that we cannot insult members of the royal family, other members, senators and members of the cabinet directly. Those things cannot be done, so I would ask members to be judicious in the words they use in the House, whether they are on the record or off the record, because if I hear that word, I will ask those members to retract that statement.

That being said, I did not hear anything that the member for Hamilton—West Ancaster—Dundas was saying in particular, so I want to let him finish his comment or question so we can continue with questions and comments. As to the other matter, I did not hear those words, but again I encourage all members to reflect on Standing Order 18, which is there as a rule of the House.

I invite the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas—

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: This matter is closed, if this is revisiting the same issue. I thank the member for Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee.

I invite the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas to rise and finish his question or statement.

John-Paul Danko: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your evaluation of the points of order here.

As I was saying, my understanding of what the members opposite are actually advocating for is freedom from accountability. When I talk to clergy and religious leaders in my community, I basically ask them a simple question: Do you advocate for hate crimes on behalf of your religion? They say, “No,” and there is no further discussion.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind the member that he is speaking through the Chair and not directly to the members opposite when using “you”.

The hon. member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley is rising on a point of order. Is this a different point of order, or is it on the same point of order that has already been settled?

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, it is a different point of order.

The member opposite earlier today was calling a member on this side a grifter. He did not apologize for it. He was told he was not allowed to make those comments. He did not apologize for defaming a member in the House. He should not be allowed to stand up and ask another question until he apologizes for his disgraceful and disrespectful comments. I want to see that happen.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, I am going to invite members. I was not in the chair when this statement or non-statement was made, so I am not aware of this. I will get to the point—

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Is this on the same point of order?

The member for Waterloo is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, there is a long-standing tradition that members are all honourable members in this chamber, and if something was to take place, members have the ability to rise and withdraw or retract. It is not for any member in this chamber to police what happens in here. Mr. Speaker, I think you are doing a good job and that you should have confidence in the job that you do.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to remind members again that there is a standing order, Standing Order 18, which dictates how members are supposed to behave. It is a fixed rule. It is not up for interpretation. I would invite members again to be judicious in the words they use. I was not in the chair earlier at the time the member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley was mentioning. I did hear the completion of the question from the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, so I now invite the member for Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies to continue with his response.

Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, just to clarify for anyone who has tuned in to the recent diatribe back and forth about conduct in the House, I do not believe any of it was directed at me because I had been conducting myself in a manner appropriate to the House. The Speaker's comments, I think, were directed at others.

However, it has been so long since the member asked the question, I have forgotten the name of his riding. However, I would just like to remind him that he has forgotten to mention a few things while he was up and had an opportunity to speak. He did not mention the crime and chaos that has been unleashed on Canada's streets since the Liberals took power over 10 years ago. He did not mention the burning of churches. Over 100 churches have been burned, and the Liberals have been silent on that. He did not mention the shootings at synagogues that have happened over the past number of months. He did not mention the extortion that has taken place because Liberals have unleashed crime and hatred on the streets like we have never seen in Canadian history.

• (1805)

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a great speech, and I think it causes us to have a lot of thought.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the really insidious nature of what we are facing here right now related to the likelihood of self-censorship that would happen if this bill is implemented.

Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, the aspect of self-censorship or censorship is really paramount to some of the discussion we are having here.

We have seen how the Liberals are shutting down debate or censoring a censorship bill. I do not think there is anything that could be more troubling from a government that has always sought to have ultimate power by censoring the people. That, I believe, is what the government is truly seeking.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat misleading when the member says that the government is attempting to censor by rushing the debate, when in fact the government could not do it alone. We have an opposition party working with the government because of an irresponsible official opposition that refuses to let the legislation pass, not recognizing that Bill C-9 combats hate. There is a great deal of intentional hatred in terms of victims out there, and this legislation assists in dealing with it.

Does the member not recognize that there are many aspects of Bill C-9 that are very positive, even from a Conservative perspective?

Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North did point out that there are many pieces of Bill C-9 that are positive. Conservatives offered to split this bill and deal with those components expeditiously, so they could have been passed long ago. It was this ultimate censorship that the government is invoking and then ending the debate on it and not allowing members who represent Canadians across the country to continue the debate so that the reality and truth could be told.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Ponoka-Didsbury will have around seven minutes for his speech.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that feels like censorship, but it is not. I know we are just going to run out of time. I want to thank all of my colleagues in the House today for this very passionate debate on an issue that I think many Canadians are paying attention to.

I would like to start with a quote from someone who is considered to be a great Liberal prime minister. Sir Wilfrid Laurier once said, "Canada is free, and freedom is its nationality." Where is this freedom today in regard to religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, when it pertains to Bill C-9? Where is the Liberal Party of Wilfrid Laurier? As a matter of fact, I think many people today are wondering if there are any Liberals left in the Liberal Party.

Former Prime Minister Laurier was born and baptized Catholic. In December, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote the justice minister and said the following:

The proposed elimination of the "good faith" religious-text defence raises significant concerns. This narrowly framed exemption has served for many years as an essential safeguard to ensure that Canadians are not criminally prosecuted for their sincere, truth-seeking expression of beliefs made without animus and grounded in long-standing religious traditions. Courts have made clear that only the most extreme forms of speech fall within the scope of hate-propaganda offences.

That says it all. Of course, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is only one of hundreds of Christian organizations. There are hundreds of Muslim organizations. There are people from all different faiths who practise here in Canada, like the Jewish community and those practising other religions from other parts of the world. All of them have come here so they can be part of that great Canadian cultural phenomenon, which used to be that we were a nation premised on freedom.

That same letter from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops goes on to say, "The removal of this provision risks creating uncertainty for faith communities, clergy, educators, and others who may fear that the expression of traditional moral or doctrinal teachings could be misinterpreted as hate speech and could subject the speaker to proceedings that threaten imprisonment of up to two years."

This is called the "chill effect". It is actually part of this legislation, not by accident, but by design. The Liberals know full well what they are proposing in this legislation and it is the chill effect that they are looking for.

Government Orders

Meanwhile, as this is a priority for some reason for the Liberal government, violent crime in Canada has skyrocketed in the last 10 years. Instead of going after violent criminals and repeat offenders, the government is targeting good neighbours, solid people and churchgoers. Folks back home in central Alberta, and indeed across Canada, have a great right to be concerned with the contents of Bill C-9 when it comes to removing the religious exemption.

While violent crime surges and our local RCMP detachments are left to try and handle surging rural crime, the government has decided to crack down on religious freedoms and faith-based groups. This is insulting, it is dangerous and it is completely out of touch.

My neighbours in Ponoka—Didsbury are right to be alarmed. The Liberal and Bloc amendments to Bill C-9 would remove long-standing protections for religious expression and in doing so, risk criminalizing sections of the Bible and other sacred texts simply because they contain teachings that some may find disagreeable. This is a deeply troubling path.

Canada has always upheld the principle that people of all faiths must be free to speak, preach and live according to their beliefs. That freedom should never depend on whether the government of the day approves of those beliefs or not. Conservatives oppose this latest Liberal assault on the freedom of expression and religion, and we will defend the rights of Canadians to discuss, debate and express their convictions. We will fight to keep the Liberal thought police out of Canadians' places of worship.

Canada already has clear laws against threats, violence and inciting hatred. Section 319 of the Criminal Code makes it an offence to wilfully promote hatred against any identifiable group. Similarly, section 318 makes it an offence to advocate for genocide. These laws have worked reasonably well to limit harmful hate speech, while respecting the charter rights of all Canadians. What Liberals are attempting now goes far beyond that. When the government begins redefining “hate” as anything that hurts feelings or contradicts activist narratives, it endangers open dialogue and the very foundations of a free and democratic society.

• (1810)

Over 80% of Canadians voted for either the Liberals or the Conservatives in the last election, yet the Liberals are partnering with the vehemently anti-faith, anti-religion Bloc Québécois to make amendments to Bill C-9. This would be like the Liberals allowing Albertans to make all the decisions related to oil and gas in Canada. This is what they are doing. Over 80% of Canadians voted for the Liberals or the official opposition, and one would think they would try to find common ground with the official opposition rather than a party that is basically a smaller fraction of Canada, a party that, frankly, knows it will never be in government in this country. This is who they are choosing to partner with.

The Liberals are taking Canada down an incredibly dangerous path through their partnership with the Bloc Québécois. No Canadian voted for this. The Liberals are penalizing Canadians of faith through support from the Bloc Québécois to target people and beliefs that they simply do not agree with. This is an unjust and barbaric assault on the freedoms of Canadians who merely think differently from the government, while the real criminals are able to reoffend.

It is quite telling that the government is using procedural tactics to push this bill forward when it could have used those same tactics to change the bail laws. It is telling that this is what the government's priority actually is.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, March 10, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the report stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on Motion No. 1.

[*English*]

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

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we would request to have it defeated on division, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion No. 1 negatived)

Hon. Stephen Fuhr (for the Minister of Justice) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

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

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

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 86*)

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

Government Orders

Blois	Bonin	Schiefke	Sgro
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe	Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Carney	Carr	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Casey	Chagger	Sodhi	Solomon
Champagne	Champoux	Sousa	Ste-Marie
Chang	Chartrand	St-Pierre	Tesser Derksen
Chatel	Chen	Thériault	Thompson
Chenette	Chi	Turnbull	Valdez
Church	Clark	van Koeverden	Vandenbeld
Connors	Cormier	Villeneuve	Watchorn
Coteau	Dabrusin	Weiler	Wilkinson
Dandurand	Danko	Yip	Zahid
DeBellefeuille	d'Entremont	Zerucelli	Zuberi — 188
Deschênes	Deschênes-Thériault		
Desrochers	Dhaliwal		
Dhillon	Diab		
Duclos	Duguid		
Dzerowicz	Earle	Aboutaif	Aitchison
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Albas	Allison
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson	Anderson	Anstey
Fancy	Fanjoy	Arnold	Au
Fergus	Fisher	Baber	Bailey
Fonseca	Fortier	Baldinelli	Barlow
Fortin	Fragiskatos	Barrett	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Fraser	Fry		Bexte
Fuhr	Gaheer	Berthold	Bonk
Gainey	Garon	Bezan	Boulerice
Gasparro	Gaudreau	Borrelli	Brassard
Gerretsen	Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)	Bragdon	Calkins
	Grant	Brock	Chambers
Gould	Guay	Caputo	Chobena
Greaves	Gull-Masty	Chong	Cooper
Guilbeault	Hanley	Cody	Dancho
Hajdu	Hepfner	Dalton	Davies (Niagara South)
Harrison	Hogan	Davidson	Deltell
Hirtle	Hussen	Dawson	Diotte
Housefather	Idlout	DeRidder	Dowdall
Iacono	Jeneroux	Doherty	Epp
Jaczek	Joseph	Duncan	Falk (Provencher)
Joly	Kelloway	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Gazan
Kayabaga	Klassen	Gallant	Genuis
Khalid	Lalonde	Généreux	Gill (Brampton West)
Koutrakis	Lamoureux	Gill (Calgary Skyview)	Gill (Windsor West)
Lambropoulos	Lapointe (Sudbury)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)	Gladu
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)	Lattanzio	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	Goodridge
Larouche	Lavack	Godin	Groleau
Lauzon	LeBlanc	Gourde	Gunn
Lavoie	Lemire	Guglielmin	Hardy
Leitão	Long	Hallan	Hoback
Lightbound	Ma	Ho	Jackson
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacDonald (Cardigan)	Holman	Jivani
MacDonald (Malpeque)	Malette (Bay of Quinte)	Jansen	Kelly
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	McGuinty	Johns	Kibble
Maloney	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	Khanna	Kmiec
McKelvie	McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	Kirkland	Kram
McKnight	Michel	Konanz	Kronis
Ménard	Miller	Kramp-Neuman	Kusie
Miedema	Morrissey	Kuruc	Lake
Mingarelli	Naqvi	Kwan	Lawrence
Myles	Nguyen	Lantsman	Lefebvre
Nathan	Normandin	Lawton	Lewis (Essex)
Noormohamed	Oliphant	Leslie	Lloyd
Ntumba	O'Rourke	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Mahal
Olszewski	Perron	Lobb	Malette (Kapusking—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Osborne	Plamondon	Majumdar	Martel
Petitpas Taylor	Provost	Mantle	Mazier
Powlowski	Rana	May	McKenzie
Ramsay	Rocheffort	McCauley	McPherson
Robertson	Royer	McLean (Calgary Centre)	Menegakis
Romanado	Saini	Melillo	Morrison
Sahota	Sari	Moore	Muys
Sarai	Sawatzky	Motz	Patzer
Savard-Tremblay		Nater	

NAYS

Members

Adjournment Proceedings

Paul-Hus	Poilievre
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Reynolds
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Ross
Rowe	Ruff
Scheer	Schmale
Seeback	Shipley
Small	Steinley
Stevenson	Strahl
Strauss	Thomas
Tochor	Tolmie
Uppal	Van Popta
Vien	Viersen
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Williamson	Zimmer — 144

PAIRED

Members

Block	Hodgson
Stubbs	Sudds — 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

* * *

[*English*]

INDUSTRY

Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the government more than once to provide some clarity on its complicity in the pump-and-dump scandal, Lion Electric vehicles.

I will give a quick recap. Lion Electric built school buses in Quebec, and the government of Quebec invested \$230 million in an electric bus maker as part of its green transition efforts. It stipulated that all electric school buses purchased in Quebec must be produced there.

This was one more salvo from the green everything crowd, most of whom are just profiteers, as it turns out. In the case of Lion, this could not be more clear.

With all the hype, the mandate, the supposed inevitability of electrifying everything, what appears to be a monopolistic mandate, and a quarter-billion-dollar investment from a provincial government, the profiteers got to work. The hype machine ratcheted up. Private funds flowed to Lion at cheap valuations from connected opportunists. Then came the merger with the U.S.-listed special purpose acquisition company, known as an SPAC, that put almost half a billion dollars onto the balance sheet of Lion.

Why the confidence in this transaction? It is because two months before the transaction, the Government of Canada announced a grant of \$100 million to Lion, half of which came through the strategic innovation fund and half from the Government of Quebec.

It was a well-funded company participating in the inevitable and supposedly cheap green transition that the Liberal government

trumpeted loudly. What could go wrong? As it turned out, almost everything could: school buses that burned, school buses that cost more to maintain and insure, and school buses that were less reliable. All in all, it was a much higher cost to society than the buses they were destined to make obsolete, but the scam lies in the financial fraud.

Investors were duped out of the entirety of their funds when Lion faced the inevitable bankruptcy of a business built on hype, a house of cards and a false premise from government officials guilty at least of ignoring all the facts.

Here is the connected complicity: \$50 million from the strategic innovation fund, \$400 million in financing arrangements through the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and to top it all off, a loan guarantee from Export Development Canada to the lenders associated with the company, who were making money all the way home.

This is the very definition of socializing risk and privatizing profits: Heads, banks win, and tails, Canadian taxpayers lose. It was not just Canadians, as it turns out. The head of the Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S., Lee Zeldin, has publicly stated that the purchase of these buses by American entities cost American taxpayers \$160 million in buses that were not delivered. In his words, the people involved got to keep all the money, and people need to go to prison.

The CEO of Lion Electric, Marc Bédard, cashed in \$33 million of his shares prior to Lion's declaring bankruptcy. Michel Ringuet, an insider of Cycle Capital and closely associated with the government's \$400-million green slush fund scandal, took 1.1 million shares himself.

My question to the government has always been, can it please disclose how much Export Development Canada has guaranteed funds to the financiers of Canada on this? It is an obscene amount of money, and it is something that needs to be disclosed.

Accountability rests with the government here. We are looking forward to it. I have asked many times, and I am asking again tonight that it provide those numbers from Export Development Canada.

● (1905)

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the particular matter raised by my colleague, it would not be appropriate for a minister or parliamentary secretary to indicate an opinion on criminality. This is a matter for law enforcement and the courts to determine. However, it is important to acknowledge the member's concerns.

Canada's new government takes financial crimes seriously. This is why our government has introduced the first-ever national anti-fraud strategy through budget 2025. We have committed more resources to the RCMP, to a new Canadian financial crimes agency and to stronger FINTRAC authorities in order to better prevent and respond to financial wrongdoing accusations. The new financial crimes agency will bring together the required expertise to investigate crimes such as money laundering, online fraud and financial scams, and recover criminals' illicit proceeds.

For some prior context on the matter at hand, the government announced a contribution through the strategic innovation fund with Lion Electric in March 2021, of which \$31 million has been disbursed according to the public accounts of Canada audit. This loan was paid out as a partially repayable contribution to Lion Electric, which the government continues to monitor as Justice Canada and the court-appointed trustees evaluate the next steps.

In this new global era, we know that unjustified U.S. tariffs have impacted our industries. These we cannot control but we can control our responses. We can work with the industries to strengthen the Canadian economy. The company has unfortunately faced a number of financial challenges, which resulted in the company seeking creditor protection in late 2024 and ultimately being sold to a group of Quebec-based investors in 2025.

As we continue to modernize our response to the changing global landscape and work closely with our cross-government partners, we will continue to ensure that Canadian taxpayers get responsible governance and responsible use of taxpayers' dollars, to create a stronger, more resilient Canadian economy.

It is absolutely vital, in this time of global uncertainty, that Canada remains focused on economic development, protecting and creating jobs, and attracting talent, both home and abroad, as well as investments.

Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I will first say that counting on a new task force for the RCMP to investigate crimes in the past is shutting the gate after the horses have left. I also do not expect the government to be actively investigating people who are clear insiders and well-connected with the Liberal government that sits today.

This is something that we need to get to the bottom of very quickly. The sole thing I am asking here in the House of Commons is for the government to finally acknowledge how much money the Export Development Corporation, which guaranteed the loans of the financiers who made money hand over fist from the Lion Electric “pump and dump” scam, has on its balance sheet as far as a liability goes for the taxpayers of Canada. They have not disclosed that. How many times do I have to ask for that? That is public information. The accountability should be there.

What is the number?

Wade Grant: Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear. We will not tolerate financial wrongdoing.

Budget 2025 introduced new, strengthened measures to ensure stronger financial oversight and improved detection and prevention of financial crimes across Canada. We are committed to ensuring that our industries are not only protected from this current global environment, but strengthened and able to adapt to changing condi-

tions. We will continue to ensure that public funds are safeguarded and used responsibly, while acting decisively to support responsible innovation efforts.

Adjournment Proceedings

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a little over a week before another terrible April Fool's trick by the Liberal Prime Minister will be played on Canadians. The illusion that he would like everyone in Canada to believe is that the carbon tax is dead and buried, but what the Liberal Prime Minister is not coming clean with Canadians on, and what he does not like to talk about, is the fact that the industrial carbon tax is still lurking behind the shadows, and on April 1, that carbon tax is set to go up to \$110 a tonne. Right now, it is about \$95 a tonne. That is almost a 16% increase.

That industrial carbon tax trickles down to consumers in so many different ways. Every company in Canada that produces something, and every company, business and factory that uses energy, has to pay that carbon tax. Those costs get passed down to consumers. Every farmer who buys fertilizer and equipment, who has to pay for fuel to haul back and forth between the grain elevator and the terminal or who picks up supplies and inputs as we enter the growing season, has to pay that carbon tax. All of that gets passed on to consumers. The truckers who have to transport goods from the processing centres to the distributors have to pay that carbon tax.

In fact, when the industrial carbon tax was set at \$40 a tonne, just a few years ago, studies showed that the effect of that on a Toronto to Montreal food haul added about \$2,000 a year to the cost of just the trucking. That does not include any of the processing or energy costs that those companies involved in making or processing food pay. That is just the transportation alone, and that was at \$40 a tonne. On April 1, when that jumps to \$110 a tonne, that represents almost a threefold increase to the industrial carbon tax from just a few years ago.

Adjournment Proceedings

I said that the industrial carbon tax was lurking in the shadows, and I use the word “shadow” for a very specific reason. It is because the Liberal Prime Minister, before he ran for Liberal leader, was often out on the world stage saying the problem with the carbon tax was that people noticed it. He actually said this over and over again in interviews, on panels and in his book *Values: Building a Better World for All*. He said that the consumer carbon tax was divisive and that people saw it when they filled up their cars with gas and when they paid their utility bills, so his solution was to hide it. He actually said in an interview that the right way to do it was to take it off of the receipts that Canadians had to pay and bury it on the back end. He literally said that we need, in effect, a shadow carbon tax, and that is exactly what he has done.

He wrote that book *Values*, and I reference that book for a reason. If I had written a book called “Values” where I defined myself as a human being on almost a moral level and professed my love of a carbon tax and my desire to leave oil and gas in the ground, when I decided to run for politics, people might not believe me if I suddenly claimed to have had a conversion and disavowed everything I had ever written.

The Liberal Prime Minister does not want to develop our natural resources. He believes in the radical, most extreme form of net zero, which would leave our natural resources in the ground. He actually said in an interview with the media that the best course of action for Canada is to leave up to 50% of our natural resources in the ground.

Why will the government not finish the job and eliminate the industrial carbon tax so that Canadians do not have to pay this useless tax on the consumer side or the industrial side?

• (1910)

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear that I and this government take food affordability concerns seriously. We know that families across the country are feeling the pressure of higher grocery bills. That is why earlier this year we introduced the Canada grocery and essentials benefit, previously the GST credit. This new benefit will boost payments to Canadians by 25% for five years plus a one-time 50% increase, delivering up to \$1,890 to families nationwide. This is significant money to help with rising costs, including for families in my own community of the Musqueam First Nation.

To understand the cost of rising food prices, it is important that we have an honest conversation about what is actually driving prices and what our policies are designed to do. Food prices in Canada—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Wade Grant: Mr. Speaker, I have two young kids, so it is okay. I have dealt with people yelling at me when I am trying to do my job.

Food prices in Canada, as in many countries, have been influenced by a range of global factors. Supply chain disruptions, geopolitical instability, extreme weather and rising production costs have always played a role in putting pressure on food systems worldwide. These are challenges that farmers and producers are facing not just here in Canada, but across the globe.

With respect to Canada's climate policies, it is important to clarify the facts. Canada's industrial carbon pricing system applies to large industrial emitters. It is designed to encourage efficiency and cleaner production while protecting the competitiveness of Canadian industries that operate in global markets. It does not apply to individual Canadians or to farms, and it is structured specifically to avoid driving investment or jobs out of this country. This approach ensures that Canadian industries remain competitive as more and more international markets place a premium on low-carbon production. Rolling back these policies would not lower grocery bills, but would introduce uncertainty for business owners and risk, leaving Canadian exporters at higher exposure to carbon border measures, which key trading partners are already putting in place.

The same principle applies to the clean fuel regulations. These regulations set performance standards for fuel suppliers and provide multiple flexible options for compliance, including blending low-carbon fuels or investing in cleaner production. They do not mandate a specific price increase at the pump, and the actual impact depends on how suppliers choose to comply. Independent analysis indicates that the overall impact on fuel prices is expected to remain modest. Suggestions that we cancel the clean fuel regulations are misguided. They have supported billions of dollars of investments in clean fuel projects while supporting sustainable jobs across Canada.

In short, climate action and affordability are not competing goals. Well-designed climate policies are supporting innovation and investment in Canada's energy sector while reducing emissions that contribute to climate change. That matters because climate change itself is already affecting food production through droughts, floods and other extreme weather events that disrupt harvests and supply chains. Climate action and economic resilience go hand in hand. Our approach is to support farmers and producers, strengthen competition and ensure that Canada's economy remains strong and competitive in the changing global market while also protecting the environment and public health for future generations.

• (1915)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, there is so much wrong with what that member just said. I wish I had more time.

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First of all, this grocery rebate was the exact same policy that the Justin Trudeau Liberals tried. It failed because when the government creates more money, when it borrows more money to give out on the demand side, it causes more inflation. It is monetary policy that causes inflation, not global factors. Inflation is not like the weather. It is not something that just happens because of natural phenomena. It is because of domestic policies, including deficit spending bankrolled by the creation of money.

Do not take my word for it. This is exactly what happened in the previous Liberal government. It is what is going to happen today. The proof of that is the fact that every other country in the G7 is also facing those global factors. Under this Liberal Prime Minister's government, under his policies, Canada has the highest food inflation because it has the worst domestic economic policy.

The parliamentary secretary talked about the fuel standards, and their not mandating an increase, but the effect of the policies will be that increase. It is going to be 17¢ a litre. Canadians cannot afford that. Farmers cannot afford that. That is going to add to price increases.

Wade Grant: Mr. Speaker, the government will not take steps that weaken Canada's competitiveness or create uncertainty for industries that support good jobs in this country.

Industrial carbon pricing and the clean fuel regulations are carefully designed policies that reduce emissions while protecting Canadian competitiveness and encouraging innovation. They provide flexibility for businesses, maintain investment confidence and position Canadian producers to succeed in global markets that increasingly reward cleaner production. Rather than dismantling policies that support long-term economic resilience, the government will continue to work with provinces, industry, farmers and indigenous partners to strengthen affordability, support economic growth and ensure Canada remains competitive in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

THE ECONOMY

Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 11 years of Liberal government, Canadians are now struggling to feed their families. We have a record number of visits to food banks, with 2.2 million people in a single month. We have the highest food inflation in the G7, which is double that of the U.S. We have a 10% increase in homelessness in Ontario.

These numbers are more than just stats. They affect Canadians every single day. Seniors are now calling my office asking to apply for MAID, not because they are sick but because they cannot feed themselves anymore. They feel burdened. We have single parents and working-class Canadians now calling themselves the working poor. They have decent jobs but still cannot feed their families.

In Canada, we have some of the best farmers. My riding of Oxford is full of them. They are hard workers. They roll up their sleeves. They get the job done. Our planting season is just around the corner. I am getting a lot of calls from farmers telling me that their input costs are skyrocketing. They are facing increasing fertilizer tariffs and costs. I will add that we are the only country to have fertilizer tariffs on our farmers. They are seeing the industrial carbon tax go up and rising fuel costs.

All these things are not only making it harder for the farmers to farm, but they are adding more costs for Canadians at the grocery store. This is not something we want to see. We should be providing great, nutritious food to our communities, to Canadians. We have the best land, the best farmers and the best resources. However, because of the Liberals' poor domestic policies, we have seen food unaffordability hit an alarming number. We have food insecurity in places we have never seen before. The government offers temporary measures, such as a one-time food price break. That is not going to do anything to lower prices.

As we see the rising price of gas, and we are seeing it today on energy, the cost of groceries is also going to go up. Experts are saying in the latest report that came out this morning, that with rising fertilizer costs and with rising energy costs, grocery prices are going to skyrocket this summer. We are not ready for that. Canadians are not ready for that.

My question for the Liberal minister is a very simple one: What is one policy or one measure that the Liberals have taken to lower the input costs for our farmers?

• (1920)

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying that I was a basketball player growing up in high school, but I guess I am a hockey player tonight, and this is my hat trick. Here we go.

The global economy is more than a year into a profound rupture, with economic security, industrial policy and geopolitical competition increasingly shaping economic, financial and supply chain decisions. On top of that, heightened geopolitical tensions, including the recent events in the Middle East that disrupted global energy markets and shipping routes, have further underscored the fragility of global supply chains and are now contributing to elevated uncertainty.

However, there is some good news for the Canadian economy. Business sentiment in Canada has improved, and firms are diversifying suppliers and markets. Canada leads the G7 in inward foreign direct investment per capita, and businesses plan to increase their capital spending in 2026. Reflecting on this adaptability, the International Monetary Fund expects Canada to post the second-fastest growth in the G7 over 2026 and 2027.

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However, we know that the high cost of living is an issue for far too many Canadian families. This is why the government is taking action to put more money in people's pockets. It is the right thing to do, and we want more Canadians to be able to support their families, build financial stability and contribute to our country's long-term national prosperity.

Last summer, we introduced a middle-class tax cut that will save two-income families up to \$840 in 2026 and is expected to deliver over \$27 billion in tax savings to Canadians over five years. We have also limited the goods and services tax for first-time homebuyers on new homes at or under \$1 million, and reduced the GST for first-time homebuyers on new homes between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. This will save first-time homebuyers up to \$50,000, allowing more young Canadians to enter the housing market and spurring the construction of new homes across the country. We launched Build Canada Homes, which will leverage public lands, attract private capital and support modern manufacturers to help build the affordable homes that Canadians need at scale.

We also tabled budget 2025, "Canada Strong", which, as my hon. colleagues know, contains several targeted measures aimed at reducing costs for households, improving consumer protections and addressing housing affordability. For example, budget 2025 proposes to make the national school food program permanent. This program helps up to 400,000 children each year to receive meals every day and is saving participating families with two children an average of \$800 per year on groceries.

The budget also proposes to start automatically delivering federal benefits to low-income Canadians. The Canada Revenue Agency will ensure that they receive the federal benefits to which they are entitled, including those they may not even be aware of. That includes the Canada groceries and essentials benefit and the Canada child benefit. These amounts will go up in the coming years, because the benefits are indexed to inflation to ensure that they keep pace with the cost of living.

Budget 2025 also renewed the Canada Strong pass for next summer so that younger families can discover Canada at lower costs. I know many in my community will benefit from that as well.

• (1925)

Arpan Khanna: Mr. Speaker, I wish we could feed families with the word salad the member served up in the House today.

It is funny, because when the Liberals are asked about the housing crisis, they blame the Iran war. When we ask them about the 100,000 job losses, they blame the Iran war. When we ask about food insecurity and the cost of living crisis, they blame the Iran war. The Iran war started three weeks ago, but their failed policies started 11 years ago.

When we tax the farmer who grows the food, the trucker who ships the food and the processor who processes the food, guess who ends up paying? It is Canadians. Will the parliamentary secretary stand up in the House today and tell us if they will remove the fertilizer tariffs that only Canada is charging and reduce food prices for all Canadians?

Wade Grant: Mr. Speaker, I have seen that the Canada school food program has worked in my own community, where I see smiling happy kids every morning going off to school, coming home with full bellies and actually excelling in school for the first time in their lives. That is something that we need to be proud of.

At a time when global supply chain disruptions are driving up prices, the government is focused on bringing down costs, supercharging homebuilding and sustaining the important programs that support Canadians. We will continue pushing for a more resilient, affordable economy for everyone, while ensuring that Canada is resilient and not dependent on any single economic power.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:27 p.m.)

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