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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 2, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR OF CANADA

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the special report of the Correctional Investigator of Canada into the death of Matthew Ryan Hines, in accordance with section 183 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

[*English*]

I am also tabling, in conjunction with the aforementioned special report, the responses from the Correctional Service of Canada, in both official languages.

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, pursuant to section 150 of the Financial Administration Act, in both official languages, the 2016 annual report of the Canada Post Corporation.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: the 23rd report, entitled “Report 6, First Nations Specific Claims of the Fall 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada”; and the 24th report, entitled “Report 1, The Beyond the Border Action Plan, of the Fall 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

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

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the great honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, entitled “Protecting Canadians and their Rights: A New Road Map for Canada’s National Security”.

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

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Conservative Party, Canada’s official opposition, in response to the hon. member’s report, I have the honour to table a dissenting report, entitled “There Can Be No Liberty without Security”.

Unfortunately, while the aforementioned study on the national security framework was an opportunity to examine ways to make our laws work better so that Canadians are safer, the Liberal government members chose to focus on ways to handcuff our security services and take away necessary powers. For this reason, among others, the Conservative members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security could simply not support the report as tabled.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, entitled “Main Estimates 2017-18: Vote 1 under Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, Votes 1, 5 and 10 under Department of the Environment and Votes 1 and 5 under Parks Canada Agency”.

* * *

PETITIONS

YAZIDI PEOPLE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to present a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians protesting and asking for action against ISIS, given the atrocities it has committed against the Yazidi people. The petition asks the government to recognize that the Islamic state, or ISIS, has committed genocide, and it asks for action both at the International Criminal Court level and with respect to support for victims of genocide.

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I believe this is a very worthy cause, and I congratulate the organizers of this petition for bringing awareness to such atrocities and to such an important issue for the world to consider.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to present a petition on behalf of retired master corporal Collin Fitzgerald. In 2007, Collin was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for helping wounded comrades in a burning vehicle under enemy fire in Afghanistan. Collin was recognized for his incredible bravery and heroism on the battlefield. Unfortunately, he has faced a second battle since returning home to Canada. Collin is one of many veterans who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, something he has struggled with for many years. Collin's story is one of a military hero who has returned home to later face charges he claims are as a result of his PTSD. Luckily, he is supported by friends and family to help him through these difficult times.

His story has inspired hundreds of Canadians to sign a petition, which calls upon this House to do three things: first, to hold an independent inquiry into his 27-month prosecution; second, to determine how to right the wrong by overhauling the relationship between the police and the crown attorney; and third, to compensate thousands of unjustly accused Canadians.

CANADIAN FIREARMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in regard to the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee, which was created to ensure that the views of Canadians be heard when changes are considered to firearm policies, laws, and regulations; and to ensure that the committee, including firearms experts and representatives of the gun industry in Canada, advise the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of those views when considering these items.

The majority of the new membership of the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee announced on March 3, 2017, have either publicly stated that they are in favour of stricter gun control or are in fact members of the Coalition for Gun Control.

Only two members of this committee have a firearms background. Law-abiding target shooters, hunters, trappers, farmers, and collectors want increased representation on the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee and so have signed this petition.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVILEGE

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

• (1010)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today. We want to know the exact purpose of this decision by the government. We are talking about protecting the rights of the people who have been elected by Canadians to defend their policies, to defend their constituents. We belong to our constituents. We not only belong to the people who voted for us, but we also belong to all of the people we represent in our ridings. Today we consider this a threat to our duty.

Why is the government doing this today?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the hon. member's question.

We recognize that this is a very serious issue. That is why we have been discussing it. We have discussed it for six days. Including today's debate and discussion, it will be seven days. We are supportive, as I believe all members in this place are supportive. Members of Parliament should have full access to this place, including the entire parliamentary precinct. It is an issue we take very seriously. The committee should do its work and definitely study this issue to sort out why it took place and to ensure it never happens again.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is happening today has never before happened in the history of this Parliament. The Speaker ruled that the Liberal majority government's first attempt to curtail debate on our privileges as elected representatives should be blocked. The Speaker's job is to protect the rights of MPs, and that is what he did.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is at it again today. She stood before you, Mr. Speaker, hoping to put an end to a substantive debate on a question of privilege. Two members, the member for Milton in Ontario and the member for Beauce in Quebec, were denied their most basic right as elected representatives, the right to vote in the House. This is a matter of vital importance that must be debated here. Member privileges have always been an integral part of the history of our institution.

What is happening today is unprecedented. For a government to attempt to silence every member of Parliament on a question of privilege says a lot about what it really sees as privilege: the privilege of the majority to squash the minority in the House; the Prime Minister's privilege to send a convoy of empty official vehicles to block elected representatives summoned to vote on the most important bill, the budget bill. That is what we are dealing with here.

I have just one question for the person who is here representing the Liberal majority: is she not ashamed of her government's behaviour?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as we have said time and time again, the government supports the amendment and the subamendment in relation to the privilege motion because it is an important issue that should be a priority at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We understand how important this issue is. The committee must do its work in order to ensure that this never happens again. Members must be able to do their work. We want to discuss this matter at committee and we support what the members have said. I think we can work better together.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague, the member for Outremont. What is troubling is that the Liberals do not seem to learn from their past mistakes. It is hard to know if it is blatant arrogance—and that is what it seems to be, unbelievable arrogance—that they can repeat the same controlling behaviour in the House time and time again. They have this attitude that they can just get away with it. We certainly recognize that they have the majority and they are going to bully their way through everything they want to do.

We have just learned that our opposition day, which we were supposed to have this week, is now not going to happen, from what we are hearing. We have been preparing. We have very few days to bring things forward, as you know, Mr. Speaker, and now the government is shamefully telling us that we cannot have an opposition day. I think the Liberals are afraid of what might be happening on that opposition day, so once again, they are arrogantly bullying their way through the House, pushing their agenda through.

It is unacceptable, and I am wondering how long this dysfunctional Parliament is going to continue because of the terrible mistakes and terrible judgment of the Prime Minister and the Liberals.

• (1015)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a question of privilege. As I have said, as many members on the government benches have said, we support this question. We believe the committee should be studying this. We recognize that members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place so they can do the important work they are elected to do.

We agree with the opposition that the committee should make it a priority. We support the subamendment. We have said this time and time again. We have studied and had discussion on this issue for seven days, including today. We know there is very important work

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here. When it comes to the privilege of members of Parliament, something we take very seriously, we are saying that we support what the opposition is saying. We are saying let us work better together.

I do not believe we need to resort to name-calling. I believe we all have a responsibility when it comes to the way we function in this place. I believe we all have a responsibility to work in the best interests of all Canadians.

I have always kept my door open, and I will continue to do so. I will always encourage conversation. Let the committee do its work. That is why we are supporting the question, the amendment, and the subamendment.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to remember what the debate is about, which is access to the Hill. I was a staffer when I watched Yvon Godin get stopped from crossing the road to get to a vote a few years ago. It is really important that this gets to PROC to have a discussion and figure out how to solve the problems so this stops happening.

How important does the minister consider it to be to get this thing out of here and into the committee where we can study and resolve the problem?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is actually very important to allow the committee to study it to ensure we see what happened. It can actually examine evidence and make sure this does not happen again.

Every member of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place. This is an important issue that has been raised in the House. We take it very seriously, and we want to ensure that it does not happen again. The way to do that is by allowing the committee to do its work so that it can report back here to ensure it is not repeated.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is important for Canadians to understand what is going on here today. There are 338 people, representing every region of this country, who were elected to come here to represent 35 million Canadians.

The most essential thing we do is vote. We vote on motions. That is how we make things progress in this House. It has to do with refining and modernizing our laws. It has to do with budgets. These are essential things in our democracy.

Unlike the American system, where there is a real separation between the executive, the legislative, and the judicial, our executive sits on the front bench. That gives it enormous power over everything that happens in this place.

What we are seeing today with the use of closure to shut down debate on a question of privilege is an abuse of power by the executive, but it goes beyond that. The essential question here is one we raised a couple of years ago when the RCMP was being brought into the House of Commons, which they were never allowed to do in the past.

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After the shooting in the fall of 2014, there was a big scuffle to figure out how we change security here on the Hill. A fundamental mistake was made. Right now, instead of being protected by the services of the legislative branch, services that are under the orders of the executive branch are now taking over what happens here in the Parliament of Canada. That is a fundamental breach. It is a fundamental error, and it is at the root of what happened here. It was the Prime Minister's personal RCMP motorcade leaving Parliament Hill, empty, that blocked all rights of parliamentarians to come and vote on that most fundamental question: a budget. That is what this is about.

I repeat the question I asked earlier to the government House leader, using her majority today to shut down the right of parliamentarians to raise this very essence of privilege. Does she not understand what privilege is and why it exists? It exists to guarantee and protect our right to speak and vote. It is fundamental.

● (1020)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to know that I understand very well what the question is, and that is exactly why we take it very seriously. What I cannot understand, though, is why not allow this important issue to go to committee.

Why is the opposition filibustering such an important issue that should go to committee?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Where is the organ grinder? You are not the monkey.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: The member seems to be concerned that he will not get his vote. Of course he will get his vote. That is why we are here. We will vote on this important issue. We will ensure that the committee has the ability to study this important issue.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Organ grinder? That is nice.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Every member of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place. I have said that. Colleagues have said that. We can all agree.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: You had better learn the rules. The House leaders should know the rules.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: I say once again, we support this going to committee. We support the amendment. We support the subamendment. It is exactly what the member is asking for. We are saying, let the committee do its important work. Why not let it move on to the committee, which could actually determine what took place?

The member seems to believe that he knows every single thing, but the committee can do very important work by studying what took place, and I think the committee should do—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I could not hear the hon. government House leader over the heckling. I hope members will keep it down a bit.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader says that she understands the issue. She says that she supports this going to PROC, and in fact, in her response to the member for Outremont, she just said that he will

have his vote. The problem is, we should have been voting on this previously, but her government shut down and killed the first question of privilege.

Never before in Canadian parliamentary history, in nearly 150 years, has a government so blatantly killed a question of privilege before this House, as it did in this case.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, during the course of the intervention by my hon. colleague, the government House leader, I distinctly heard the leader of the New Democratic Party exclaim, “Where is the organ grinder?” I would like to invite him to clarify those comments.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will check *Hansard* and see if anyone else heard that, and maybe we will get back to the hon. member of the NDP.

The hon. member for Perth—Wellington, please continue.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I think the real question is who is pulling the strings. It is the PMO. It is the PMO that is choreographing this whole thing. In fact, the deputy Liberal whip tried a procedurally flimsy method to self-direct the committee's procedure, rather than taking the time-honoured precedent of having a motion referred by this House. This House is supreme in this matter.

The minister says that she wants to see this go to committee. Why did she kill the original motion?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the opposition might choose to play games with such an important issue. It is an issue we take very seriously. We are talking about access by a member of Parliament in the House of Commons. We are talking about a member possibly not being able to make it to the House to vote. Voting in this place is very important, and when members, regardless of the side they stand on, bring such important issues, we need to ensure that those issues are looked at, and the place to do that is at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The opposition has asked to make it a priority at PROC, and we agree. I wholeheartedly support members of Parliament having unfettered access to this place. It is their right and duty to represent their constituents in this place.

We are saying that we should let PROC do the work it needs to do. Let it study this important issue, and let us ensure that it does not happen again. Members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place, and if that was not the case, we need to know why and we need to do something about it.

This government is about action, and we will take action to ensure that it does not ever happen again.

● (1025)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am in my fifth Parliament, and I cannot tell you how many times we have already dealt with this issue at PROC. We hear every time that it will not happen again, and yet it does.

We understand when there is an emergency security issue, particularly if we are dealing with important guests from another country. We get that. However, what we have asked, and what has been ignored, is that in the planning of these events, in the planning of anything extraordinary on the Hill, there be a plan to take into account the constitutional right, not a traditional right or a nice little habit we have but our constitutional right, to have access to this place. It is for the simple reason that if a notorious government wanted to usurp our democracy, all it would have to do is lock us in our offices and hold the vote. It is clear in the Constitution that every member of Parliament has unfettered access to this place.

We have been told that the security people will take these things into account in the future. To one degree or another, I would take them at their word. I expect that they will, but it is insufficient. That is why I am saying that I have been through this many times.

When the hon. government House leader wants to know why we are making a big deal about this, it is because this is the one opportunity we have on this side of the House to say that our rights are important. When those rights are abrogated time and time again, we finally get to the point when we say enough is enough.

The leader of my party, the member for Outremont, has reminded Canadians that a major institutional shift has happened. This place used to be sovereign to us. By “us” I do not mean me. I mean whoever has the honour of sitting in the seat for Hamilton Centre and every other riding here. It is no longer our security services through our Speaker and our Sergeant-at-Arms. At the end of the day, it is now the government's police service in our House of Commons. King Charles would love it.

Since the government now controls 100% of our security, and since the government House leader is saying we should send it to PROC so we can solve this, I want an absolute, 100% guarantee from the government, because it, not us, is now in control of security, that at the end of the work PROC does, this will not happen again. I want that assurance from the people who control the security people here, which is the government, through the commissioner of the RCMP. It is not us anymore. I want that guarantee. Otherwise, the Speaker can understand very clearly why we are doing what we are doing here today.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words that have come from the hon. member. I know that he has been in this place a long time. I appreciate his service. That is why I am saying that we can do things better in this place. I believe that this system can improve. It is a conversation and discussion I have wanted to have with all members, because I think experience matters. I think new voices matter. I think the public should be part of this conversation to ensure that we are working better in this place. That is exactly what I have been asking for.

When it comes to the issue we are discussing today, the facts about what happened are unclear. That is why PROC should study this issue. The member seems to be raising many other concerns. I would encourage him to also raise them at PROC so that we can revisit these issues to ensure that members of Parliament have unfettered access to this place.

I will repeat that this is something we take very seriously. Members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place

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so they can do the important work they were elected to do. We committed to Canadians that their voices would be heard in this place. I sincerely believe that.

I believe that PROC needs to do this work. We know that in this place we can keep talking about it, but we will not be able to study it like the procedure and House affairs committee can. That is why I am saying that we should let the procedure and House affairs committee do the important work it is doing. When it comes to some of the rule changes, most likely under the previous government, when it comes to the security concerns, I say we should bring it up with PROC.

If we can make this place better, let us work together in the best interests of Canadians to make this House of Commons more effective, more transparent, and more productive.

• (1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to sit on the PROC committee when we had to deal with this issue. Every member of this House recognizes the importance of unfettered access. This government, and particularly the government House leader, has been very clear that it needs to go before PROC. That is what has happened before.

PROC, as the minister has talked about, is best equipped to deal with this issue. My understanding, and I would ask the government House leader to make it perfectly clear to opposition members, is that the government supports this. We will be voting in favour of the subamendment and the amendment. We want to see it go to PROC. That is what has previously taken place.

PROC is the best place to resolve this issue. We have seen this dealt with in the past. Yesterday I was surprised to see members, even opposition members, standing and saying that this is a filibuster. I was surprised that members would use a filibuster on an issue that is so fundamentally important. I appreciate what the member across the way said about unfettered access. I saw the passion in his speech.

I, too, want to get this issue resolved. The best way to resolve it is to have it go to PROC. We are voting in favour of it. Maybe the government House leader could re-emphasize where the government is coming from and why it is we want to see this dealt with as quickly as possible.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, this is an issue we take very seriously. All members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place. We need to ensure that PROC is able to study it so that PROC can get to the bottom of it to figure out exactly what happened.

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We know that the facts are unclear at the current time. PROC can actually study it and do the important work it needs to do to get to the bottom of the issue to ensure that it does not happen again.

I will repeat that all members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place. The role and responsibility of a member of Parliament is central to the work we do here. We believe that when we are representing Canadians, and when all of us work together, we can actually do a better job of representing them. That is why I always encourage debate. I always encourage all members of Parliament to work better together.

We know that improvements can be made. Let us work together to ensure that at the end of the day, the same common goal each of us has is to represent our constituents and to represent our country. When we work better together, we will all succeed in that endeavour. That is why I will continue to encourage it.

When it comes to this issue, I will repeat that our government will be supporting that it be taken to PROC and that it be a priority at PROC. We will be supporting the subamendment to ensure that PROC reports back in June, just as the opposition has asked. The government is supporting it. We support all members of Parliament having unfettered access to this place to do the important work all members of Parliament do.

• (1035)

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in this discussion reluctantly because it is truly unprecedented. I find myself agreeing with my colleague from Hamilton Centre to a great degree because he and I spent years together in the Ontario Legislature and now we spend our time here in Canada's Parliament. In the 20-plus years that I have of parliamentary experience, I must say that this is an unprecedented debate and an unprecedented discussion that we could be curtailing the right of members.

The hon. House leader is correct: we have to take our parliamentary responsibilities seriously. She says “unfettered access” to Parliament, but why do we want access to Parliament? We want access to Parliament so that we can speak and we can vote. That is why we are here. We need access so we can vote, and I am glad she agrees, but we also need access to speak, including on matters of privilege. She asks, perhaps rhetorically, why we would want it to go to the committee. It is because members of the House of Commons want to speak on a matter of privilege. This is one of the most fundamental rights that we have as parliamentarians.

It reminds me of the *Seinfeld* episode when Jerry was trying to rent a car and he had difficulty getting his car rental done. He said to the car rental agent, “You know how to take the reservation; you just don't know how to hold the reservation”, which is the most important part of the reservation. The hon. members on the government side know how to talk about how we should have parliamentary rights; they just do not let us have those parliamentary rights, which is the most important part of parliamentary rights.

We are reasonable people. We want to have a discussion with the government on our parliamentary rights and privileges. We wish to have that discussion in a civilized manner that befits the importance of this institution. When will the member have a serious conversation with us—not a rhetorical conversation, not firing off

letters to the opposition House leaders—so we can then have a resolution of these issues? Otherwise we continue to talk about these issues.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I welcome a serious conversation. I was asking to have a serious conversation. What is unfortunate is that not all members are willing to have that serious conversation.

I do respect some of the work the hon. member has done in this place and in the provincial legislature and within his community. I agree that perhaps there are some members in this place who want to have a real conversation. Some of his own colleagues have admitted that they are filibustering on a question of privilege. We are talking about access to Parliament for members of Parliament. This is serious. This is something that we take seriously.

The member might feel that there is something unprecedented taking place. Unprecedented? We have had seven days of debate on a question of privilege when the government is saying let it go to PROC, let the committee study it, and let us get to the bottom of this. Let us ensure it does not happen again.

Unprecedented? The opposition filibustering a question of privilege is unprecedented. Every member of Parliament has a responsibility to work in this place together in the best interests of Canadians. That is what we are saying. We will continue to work in the best interests of Canadians. We want to all work better together. I am encouraging that conversation.

To provide confidence to the hon. member, every time I offer a conversation, my door is open. I am offering it in good faith, no differently from the discussion paper. It was offered in good faith.

We need all parties to be willing to have those tough conversations. We know there will be tough conversations. I welcome the opportunity to have them. I believe it is necessary.

When it comes to this question that we are talking about today, the government will be supporting the question of privilege because we believe members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this place as well as to the parliamentary precinct. We believe that PROC members should be studying this question. We agree with the amendment that it should be a priority for PROC. We agree with the subamendment that PROC should have to report back by June.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Call in the members.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 258)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Alleslev
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brison
Caesar-Chavannes	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Chan	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
DeCoursey	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Di Iorio
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)	Freeland
Fuhr	Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardie	Harvey
Hehr	Holland
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Joly
Jordan	Kang
Khalid	Khera
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Lemieux
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Ludwig	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Soeurs	Morneau
Monsef	Nassif
Morrissey	

Nault
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Romanado
Rudd
Sahota
Saini
Sangha
Sarai
Schiefke
Shanahan
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Simms
Sorbara
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O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
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Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Tootoo
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

NAYS

Members

Albas
Allison
Anderson
Aubin
Barsalou-Duval
Benson
Berthold
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boucher
Brosseau
Calkins
Carrie
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Deltell
Doherty
Dubé
Duvall
Fast
Fortin
Garrison
Genius
Gladu
Hardcastle
Jeneroux
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Lebel
Lobb
Maguire
Marcil
McCaulley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Motz
Nantel
Nicholson
Pauzé
Poilievre
Ramsey
Rayes
Rempel
Ritz
Sansoucy
Schmale
Shiplee
Sorenson
Stetski
Strahl
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Van Kesteren	Van Loan
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Members

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The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed from May 1 consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to this question of privilege which I originally raised three weeks ago.

It is unfortunate that we must raise this issue today under the threat of a closure guillotine which was introduced once again by the Liberal government House leader. It hearkens to a time many decades ago, 60 years in fact, when a similar issue came before the House and closure was undertaken by a then Liberal government. In 1956, a Conservative member of Parliament by the name of Donald Fleming had this to say of closure in the House:

The minority in the house does not speak by leave of the majority.... No, the minority in a free parliament speaks as of right.

What has been done today has been to deprive the minority in the House of their right. Those who have forced closure on the House are attempting to create a Parliament in which there is no place for an opposition. This is what we see happening by the Liberal government. The government is attempting to turn the House not into a debating chamber, not into a place of free expression by all hon. members, but rather into a place in which the Liberal executive dominates the legislative branch.

The quotation I just read came from the pipeline debate in 1956 in this chamber, where members of all parties debated vociferously for weeks on end. In fact, that debate itself ended in a grave question of privilege, one which continues to have ramifications to this very day.

I would dare say that if C.D. Howe were alive today to see the actions being undertaken by the Liberal government, he would blush with shame. Even C.D. Howe would be ashamed of the heavy-handed tactics being undertaken by the Liberal government.

We debate today a question of privilege, the privilege of hon. members of this place to freely attend and to have free movement within the parliamentary precinct. It was a question of privilege I raised not lightly in response to the first question of privilege being killed by the Liberal government.

Of fundamental importance is that we as parliamentarians, we as members of Parliament, we as the duly elected representatives of our constituents, are free to debate, are free to speak in this place, and are free to vote, and respect the wishes of our constituents. This did not happen on March 22, budget day. Two members of Parliament, the

member for Beauce and the member for Milton, were denied their right to vote.

Free movement within this place is absolutely essential when the bells are ringing, when we are being called to a vote. It is a fundamental right which should not be tampered or tempered with, yet that is what happened. Two members of Parliament were denied their right to vote in this chamber. Imagine for a minute, two members of Parliament, representing 105,000 constituents each, did not have the opportunity to rise in their place, as is their right, and cast their vote.

In accordance with the time-honoured tradition of the House, those two members, at the first available opportunity, raised a question of privilege in the House. In the days following, I, as well as the member for Hamilton Centre, presented more information in support of the *prima facie* question of privilege.

On April 6, the Speaker correctly ruled that there were sufficient grounds for finding a *prima facie* question of privilege. At that time, the member of Parliament for Milton was invited to move the motion on the question of privilege and debate ensued afterward. Members at that time rose in their places, shared their thoughts, but no vote was held. Debate was cut off and the motion itself was killed with no immediate way of reviving that motion. The member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert moved a motion to proceed to orders of the day. This was not an innocent undertaking by the hon. member. It was a direction by the Liberal executive, knowing full well that by moving to orders of the day, this question of privilege would be killed. It would be finished.

● (1120)

The Liberal majority in this House along party lines voted in favour of killing a question of privilege. The Liberals voted in favour of killing the opportunity to discuss the fundamental rights and privileges that were breached on March 22 within this parliamentary precinct. This did not simply push the matter further down on the Order Paper; it removed it altogether from the Order Paper. To hear the government House leader this morning, stand in her place and say they agree with this question of privilege, they agree that it should go to PROC, belies the actions that she and her caucus colleagues undertook on that fateful day when they killed the question of privilege.

Never before in Canadian parliamentary history has such an arrogant course of action been undertaken by a government of any stripe. The Liberal government made history when it did this, and not the type of history that I think it would like to make. Indeed it was a grave injustice to so recklessly dismiss a question of vital importance that affects all 338 of us who serve in this chamber, yet it is another example of the Liberal government, the Liberal executive, dominating the legislative branch of this place, and in so doing disregarding the views and the role of the House of Commons and our important role in parliamentary democracy.

Privilege

Indeed, two members were denied the right to vote on that day, but by the Liberal government's actions, all 338 members were denied the right to vote. Perhaps it would do well for the Liberal members across the way, those who do not serve in cabinet, to remember they too are members in this House. They may sit as Liberal MPs, but they are simply members of Parliament like each and every one of us, and their rights were denied too when the Liberal government moved to orders of the day.

Then something else happened. The Liberals tried a procedurally flimsy method to get this issue to PROC, the procedure and House affairs committee. Indeed the deputy whip of the Liberal Party, the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, gave notice of a motion in the procedure committee to self-direct the procedure and House affairs committee to study this matter. That is a procedurally flimsy method that is not supported by the mandate of the committee, but nonetheless it was attempted.

In fact, that member tried to say that she did not like the idea of the House directing the study of a committee. She did not like the idea of the House of Commons directing a timeline for a committee study. Perhaps she, as deputy whip of the Liberal Party, may have been mistaken in assuming that committees trump the House of Commons, which is certainly not the case. We as members of Parliament who sit in this House direct the work of the legislative branch of government, not the Liberal Party acting on the direction of the PMO, on the direction of the government House leader, but that is exactly what happened.

We see this happening time and again, whether it was Motion No. 6 or whether it was the discussion paper. I was going to say the discussion paper tabled by the government House leader, but it was never tabled. She did not show the courtesy to us as members of Parliament, to us as parliamentarians, to table her discussion paper here in the House of Commons. She wants to change the rules of this place, but she will not table the document on which she wishes to have a discussion. Instead, she released it online rather than in this great, august chamber. It is this chamber, this House of Commons, that gives a government the ability to govern. It is only with the confidence of this chamber of each and every member of Parliament through the confidence convention that the government may undertake action.

• (1125)

I must be abundantly clear that the actions of the Liberal government hold a dangerous precedent. To have so recklessly dismissed such an issue does not bode well for the future. Indeed, we can imagine situations in which minority governments may exist, where tight votes may be undertaken, where a single vote or two votes could affect the outcome.

I remember well, long before I was elected, that in 2005, a vote on the budget was held in the House. It was a tie vote, thanks to the then independent MP Chuck Cadman, who voted with the government at that time. The Speaker was forced to break that tie. One vote would have changed the direction of that vote. One vote would have resulted in the government falling on a vote of confidence. This is where we find ourselves today. Members of Parliament being prevented from coming to this place to vote is a fundamental challenge must be addressed.

When this question of privilege was killed by the Liberal government, it set a terrible precedent. It is why, at the very first opportunity, I rose in the House and raised a second question of privilege. At the very first opportunity, I sought to reignite, to revive, the important question of privilege, because that is what it was. It was a question of privilege of two members who were denied the right to vote in the chamber.

On April 11, the Speaker, expressing great wisdom and citing precedent on similar matters, made his ruling. He indeed found once again that a *prima facie* question of privilege existed.

I want to quote exactly what the Speaker said in his ruling. He stated, "...the situation in which the House finds itself is unprecedented. The Chair can find no instance of debate on a matter of privilege superseded by the adoption of a motion to proceed to orders of the day." Never before had it occurred. The Speaker found no precedent on this matter. He went on to state, "...the Speaker has a duty to uphold the fundamental rights and privileges of the House and of its members."

Too often we see the role of the Speaker as a referee, as a playground monitor, as someone trying to maintain order, and certainly the Speaker has that role to play in maintaining order in this place and ensuring the smooth flow of debate. However, more important and more fundamental, the Speaker of the House is the defender and protector of the rights and privileges of each and every member of the House.

Therefore, the Speaker, in his ruling, invited me, as the person who raised the subsequent question of privilege, to move a motion that this question of privilege be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We know from past practice and similar questions that have been raised in the past that this is the appropriate place in which questions of privilege ought to be dealt with.

I was recently reviewing the selected decisions of Mr. Speaker Peter Milliken. My colleague, the member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington, was kind enough to loan me his copy. He mentioned that he had already read it from cover to cover and no longer had use for it.

In that case, on December 1, 2004, a member was denied the right to enter the chamber due to the visit of an American president at the time. The Speaker of the day, Mr. Speaker Milliken, correctly found, in a similar case, that the matter should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Then the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord moved such a motion and the motion was sent to the procedure and House affairs committee, which undertook an extensive study and reported back to the House with specific undertakings that ought to be taken by security personnel and the RCMP.

• (1130)

That is where we find ourselves today.

It should be noted, as well, that the motion I moved was subsequently amended, rightfully and correctly so, by my colleague, the member for Battle River—Crowfoot, who said that this ought to take priority over all other business of the procedure and House affairs committee.

Privilege

Why was that necessary? In normal times, that amendment would not be necessary. However, in this case, it was because of the Standing Orders standoff precipitated by the Liberal government House leader's failed discussion paper.

That amendment was subsequently amended as well by a subamendment by my colleague, the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan. I would like to extend our well wishes to the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan and wish him a speedy recovery. He has served in the House for 13 years, always ably serving, especially on procedure and House affairs matters, as well as a former parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. I know all members would join us in sending him our best wishes and a hope for speedy recovery, and to see him back in this place debating the important matters as soon as possible.

These amendments are absolutely essential, given the context of where we stand and given where the procedure and House affairs committee finds itself. We find ourselves in a situation where the Liberal government is trying to enforce and ram changes down the throats of the opposition. It is trying to change the opposition from an effective opposition to an audience. That is what has been undertaken for three weeks in the procedure and House affairs committee.

Now, without warning and without notice, that meeting was adjourned without even the opportunity for my friend, my colleague, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, to raise a point of order during that meeting before the gavel was quickly hit on the table.

When the government House leader presented her discussion paper on modernizing Parliament, members from this side, and I think most Canadians, saw it as a smokescreen, a flimsy attempt to take more power and put it in the hands of the executive, put it in the hands of the Liberal Party. What is more interesting is the timeline in which the Liberals insisted this be done. Fundamental changes to the way we operate in the House was to be done by June.

Ostensibly, I suspect, it was so the Liberals could ram these changes down our throats before the end of this spring session, so they could prorogue in the fall to undertake a fresh Speech from the Throne to try to recover their lost legislative agenda.

It is interesting, as well, that the undertakings of the committee are so much in lockstep with the actions of the government. Within hours of the discussion paper being released to the public, it quickly became clear that a member tabled the motion in order to have it dealt with in an expedited fashion at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It was that challenge, that fundamental mistake about which I think all of us as parliamentarians feel regretful.

While I am on my feet, I would like to move to a final topic of discussion, and that is how fundamental the rights and privileges of all Canadians are and how much they ought to be respected in this place. Each and every member of Parliament stands here to represent, in my case 105,000, our constituents. Our voices ought not be diminished. The changes being proposed by the Liberal government would do just that.

Fundamentally, this is a question of privilege, and we must at all times respect the privileges of the members of the House.

● (1135)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting six days of debate in which we have been talking a great deal about this privilege. I have found that less than 50% of the members are talking about other issues not related to the issue at hand. I applaud the member for sticking to topic, which is unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. Whether it is the government House leader or other members of the Liberal caucus, we have been very consistent. We treat this with the utmost importance. We want the matter to go the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We have indicated that we will support the amendment.

It is disturbing, at the very least, when members of the opposition talk about using this privilege as a filibuster. That is very serious and other members should wonder whether that is the motivation behind the opposition. Members of the opposition say that it is an important privilege, the privilege of accessibility to parliament precinct, but they want to filibuster.

Would the member agree that unfettered access is what this debate should be about and that the best way to deal with this, as we have done in the past, is have the debate. We are on day six of debate. Usually it is a one day debate, maybe two, and then it goes to PROC. Why does the member believe it is not going to committee unless he is justifying a filibuster on the important issue of privilege?

● (1140)

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member why his government, his party, saw fit to kill the original motion on the question of privilege. It was his party, his government, that failed to see this issue initially come to a vote in the House. It was his government that launched the discussion paper that disrupted the procedure and House affairs committee for three weeks. This is a fundamental question of privilege. This is about the free access of parliamentarians to the parliamentary precinct.

Why would the Liberals kill that original motion? They did so because of their Standing Order standoff. They did so because they were intent and committed to ramming changes down the throats of the opposition. Now they have given up on the procedure and House affairs committee and will bring those straight to the House of Commons and make those changes in this place, directly using their majority.

The rights and privileges of members must be respected and it is a true shame that the original question of privilege by the members for Beauce and Milton was killed by the Liberal government, which prevented it from going to the PROC committee when it ought to have gone there.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. The Government of Canada has been very clear. The Liberal caucus has been very clear. We want this issue to go to PROC. We have been articulating that for weeks now. What is preventing it from going to PROC are the opposition party members. They are the ones who are denying it from going to PROC.

Privilege

If we want to talk about hypocrisy, why will the Conservative Party in particular not allow this issue to go to PROC where it could actually be dealt with? We recognize unfettered access and how important it is to the parliamentary precinct. Why does the Conservative Party not recognize it as an important issue to the degree that we get it to PROC where it needs to be dealt with?

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I would add that it was this Conservative Party that raised the question of privilege. It was this Conservative Party that moved the appropriate amendment and subamendment so this issue could take priority at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We see this as such a fundamental importance that we amended the motion to give it priority at committee.

I know the deputy Liberal whip does not agree with that, so I would be curious to know if she is willing to resign from the procedure and House affairs committee now that her government is supporting exactly what she argued against at committee. This Conservative Party will always stand up for the rights and privileges of parliamentarians in this place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear from my colleague from Ontario. I would like to congratulate him on his oratorical skills, but more importantly, on the quality of his research.

He was only recently elected, about a year and a half ago, so he is just starting to get his feet wet in parliamentary life. I was also elected to the House of Commons a year and a half ago, but I sat in the National Assembly before that, and I have a few white hairs to show for it. My colleague has distinguished himself thanks to the quality of his work and his arguments, as well as how he presents those arguments.

As a new member, what does he think of the attitude of the Liberal government, which, in recent months, earned the distinction of being the caucus that has tried to muzzle the opposition members more than ever before, even though these members represent everyone in their respective ridings here in the House of Commons?

• (1145)

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for the question. He is right, the Liberal government wants to change the rules of the House to its advantage.

[*English*]

The Liberals want to change the rules of this place for their benefit. They want to change the rules of this place to make it easier for them to do so without the nuisance of an opposition. They want to be able to curtail debate, both in this place and in committee, without the nuisance of an opposition. They want to be able to ram things through committee stage and the House without the full debate that ought to be had by the 338 members of this place. They disguise it as an attempt to make this place more family friendly, yet they have not undertaken the work that ought to be done to really do that.

In fact, the procedure and House affairs committee undertook a study on making Parliament more family friendly, and it came back with a number of recommendations. One was that we not proceed

with eliminating Friday sittings, yet when we saw the discussion paper from the Liberal government House leader, once again she was bringing up the subject of eliminating Friday sittings, of eliminating 26 question periods a year, and requiring the Prime Minister himself to only appear in question period one day per week.

This is an attempt by the Liberal majority to change the rules of how this place operates. In the past, the practice has been, with limited exceptions, that when the fundamental rules of this place were changed, they were changed with the consensus of parliamentarians from all political parties. That has been the practice that has happened nearly every time in the past, with an exception or two. That is the way it ought to happen.

The rules of Parliament do not belong to the executive branch; they belong to the legislative branch, the members of this House. That is why we are standing here during this debate on privilege, and in the procedure and House affairs committee, to defend the rights and privileges of each and every member of this House.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his comments. He is always well-researched and articulate, and I commend him for that.

However, when we are representing what other parties are putting forward, it is very important that our representation be very accurate. That is the part I want to get to today in my question for the hon. member. It is the issue of misrepresenting what this side of the House and our Liberal members on the other side are trying to put forward here, and I would like to acknowledge our Liberal members on the other side.

First, unfettered access is critical. I have spoken in the House about this. It is very important. We have to ensure that all members have unfettered access. This is not a new problem. This is not a problem that has happened just since the Liberals have been in government; it has happened over the past years. In 2012, a discussion came up with respect to three people. In 2014, the issue came up again. This is an ongoing debate, so the first thing I would ask is if the hon. member would acknowledge that we, the Liberals on this side of the House, agree that unfettered access is extremely important.

Second, everyone on PROC wants to study this issue. That was clearly stated at PROC. Any representation to the contrary is simply a misrepresentation and inaccurate.

Could the hon. member please clarify those two items for the House?

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, it is good to see that the Liberal government is finally agreeing to make this issue a priority. It is just unfortunate that it could only do so after a second revived Groundhog Day-type question of privilege. It would have been preferable if the government had simply agreed to the initial motion put forth by my colleagues from Milton and Beauce.

Privilege

I accept that the procedure and House affairs committee wants to study this matter, and I think that is great, but the issue is that it could not study it at the time, without the amendments, because it was embroiled in a Standing Order standoff in which the discussion of the government's discussion paper was taking priority. We believe that questions of privilege ought to take priority.

• (1150)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to resume debate on the question of privilege raised by my colleagues concerning the privileges that the House gives to MPs.

First, let me express my shock that our friend from Perth—Wellington does not already have *Selected Decisions of Speaker Peter Milliken*. I am surprised he does not have first copies signed already, perhaps for Christmas.

Raising this question of privilege segues nicely into the important debate on the fundamental changes that the government wants to make. It sneakily proposed the changes at a Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs meeting by tabling a motion about reforms to the way Parliament and the House of Commons work.

This is not the first time the government has attempted to change the rules to suit its own purposes. Indeed, it seems the government views Parliament as a mere inconvenience to be disposed of, deigned to, and privileged to behold the presence of the Liberal members of Parliament at all times.

I am very pleased to serve on the operations and estimates committee. On this committee, OGGO, we have studied great things such as Canada Post, Shared Services, and, a little while ago, estimates reform.

The Conservatives and my colleagues in the NDP have agreed with the Treasury Board that we do need to reform the way we do estimates to make them more transparent and to align them better with the budget. Unfortunately, what had been proposed by the Liberal government was to take away two full months of estimates overview, leaving the opposition with merely a month to look at estimates. This was explained by the government as a better way to do things.

Taking away oversight from the opposition on spending is not necessarily a better way to do things.

When we tried to argue that this is not a good way, we received very clear notice from the government that it intended to change the standing order without consent of all parties.

Our colleague from Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, who was chair of the committee—and I express my well-wishes to him as well—asked the President of the Treasury Board again and again if he could guarantee that we will not change the standing order for estimates reform, and again and again we heard, “No, we will not commit to that.” When we suggested that perhaps there could be another way to change the estimates, the comment from the President of the Treasury Board was that estimates were merely busy work, not pertinent to Canadians. This is the whole attitude of the Liberal government: it is that anything it disagrees with is not pertinent work.

I want to quote from King Edward's first writ of summons for the Model Parliament, which said, “Inasmuch as a most righteous law of the emperors ordains what touches all should be approved of all, so it evidently appears that common dangers should be met by measures agreed upon in common.”

Basically, there is a very good argument to be made that the Westminster Palace or the Westminster system exists for spending oversight, and we have seen that the Liberals, just as they are trying to change the rules on the way Parliament works, are trying to change the Standing Orders on estimates, the way we oversee spending, to make things more convenient for them.

Now, let us go back a bit further, to just after the 2015 election.

Imagine the look on the ministers' faces they found out they had been selected to do God's work in the brand new cabinet, full of all the bells and whistles. On the day they were sworn in, Liberal members were sworn in at Rideau Hall after riding to the ceremony in a city bus. The bus was to serve as a reminder of the need to remain humble in the face of repeated attempts to play up their status.

These ministers worked hard to avoid indulging in their privileges. Many of them likely felt entitled to all the trimmings that come with working for this Prime Minister, so really, we must respect their ability to abstain from taking advantage of their positions of power.

Let us remember that the health minister did not rent stretch limousines, but rather just luxury sedans. Instead of wasting several hundred taxpayer dollars per car ride, she only wasted a few hundred.

These actions truly represent the work of someone humbled by her position and experiences and cognitively aware of the ample resources she could have taken advantage of, yet she nobly refrained.

I am, of course, being satirical.

Rather than demonstrating an acute awareness of the powers and privileges to which their positions as members of the highest governing council in this country entitles them and of the thin line between proper compensation for their heroic efforts on behalf of the Liberal Party and excessive indulgence in the fruits of taxpayer-paid luxuries, these ministers have all too often seen fit to take advantage of their extraordinary positions.

We know that they've taken advantage of their positions because we've discovered dozens of examples of nefarious uses of parliamentary and public resources.

As per our job description as members who sit on the left side of the Speaker, we oppose. We ask questions. We demand clarity. We seek accountability. We search for and find evidence of wrongdoing, and bring these questions to this place, our temple of democracy, because that is exactly what we are supposed to do.

Privilege

• (1155)

It is only natural that members opposite would get defensive on the off chance that their misdemeanours and casual immoderation at the expense of taxpayer dollars would be discovered by a member of this side of the House. All we ask for is clarification.

Why did the minister rent expensive limos on the taxpayers' dollar?

Why did the Minister of Justice think it was appropriate to attend Liberal fundraisers at a downtown Toronto law office that provided exclusive access to a minister of the Prime Minister's inner circle?

Why did the Prime Minister think it was appropriate to violate federal law and take a private aircraft to his vacation on billionaire island, especially when there were other options available? It was a private island owned, by the way, by a registered lobbyist whose organization receives hundreds of millions of Canadian taxpayer dollars.

Why did the Prime Minister mislead Canadians when he said that a private aircraft was the only option to go for this vacation?

These are reasonable questions, ones that members opposite would no doubt have asked if a Conservative government had been in charge and was committing such abuses of power. However, these members and ministers cannot be bothered to answer these questions from the opposition. They stick to prepared talking points handed down by the PMO and rarely take the initiative to deviate from the Liberal norm.

It is typical, really. The government abuses power and privileges that have been accorded to it not by law but rather by the sheer intimidation of the power of its office. It hides behind legal technicalities and shunts responsibilities to those who carry out the work and neglects to take responsibility for ordering its dirty work to be carried out. Then when it gets caught, it shouts and screams, full of sound and fury on this venerable stage, with Canadians watching, its words signifying nothing.

When questions about protecting the powers enshrined in the history and traditions of this place come before us and are dismissed with such a cavalier disregard for the democratic norms that have underpinned the stability and prosperity of our nation, it is truly disturbing. It leaves us asking, "What is next? What is the next tradition that Liberals will give up because it is inconvenient or obstructive to the good work of the Liberal manifesto?"

Perhaps we should not meet at all. Perhaps we should just set up iPads, have MPs phone in during question period, vote electronically, and submit debate speeches by email. Really, by extension of the Liberal logic of updating this place, there is no need for MPs to show up at all. Every accommodation could be made to ensure that MPs never need to get out of the bed in the morning and come here.

I am sure the Liberals would love that: one hour less each day for members to scrutinize the front bench and ask questions on behalf of our constituents, several hours fewer each day for members to debate legislation before the House, much less time for MPs to discover scandals and abuse of privilege, one less day for MPs to introduce those pesky private members' bills that the Liberals so readily disparage.

Just think of the size of limousine the health minister could have rented and charged to taxpayers if she had not had to face members of Parliament in this House. Imagine the amount of money that the Liberal Party of Canada could raise if it could charge money for every phone call, every cup of coffee that a minister has with someone who is not staff. Just think of the vacations the Prime Minister could take if he did not have to answer to the people of Canada through this temple of democracy.

Members opposite will say I am exaggerating, and maybe I am a bit. The government House leader did not propose rules that would allow members to stay at home all the time.

Members do have important work to do in engaging with our constituents. That is why we spend 26 weeks a year engaging with our constituents and 26 weeks a year here, forming their concerns into legislation that can make their lives better. That is the end goal.

Perhaps the aspect of the government's approach to accountability that is of most concern in this House is its willingness to disregard its principles, such as they are, in favour of whatever happens to be most expedient on a given day. Most of its suggested reforms do not objectively enhance the workings of Parliament but instead give more discretion to the government to decide on what it thinks and feels is appropriate, given the situation. "Trust us", it says, "We'll do the right thing." However, I really do not trust it. Really, the only people who trust the members opposite to act within generally accepted guidelines, such as transparency and accountability to the people of Canada, are the members opposite themselves. So blinded by the trappings of power are the members opposite that they too often sit by idly and applaud when the government House leader defends in the indefensible or tries to comprehend the incomprehensible.

Do members remember just a few weeks ago, when the Prime Minister stood to answer every question asked in question period? The Liberals used it as an attempt to demonstrate the benefits of moving to a Prime Minister's question period-type set-up and extolled the virtues of their proposal. Then the member for Chilliwack—Hope inconveniently stood and said, "Yes, we notice how the Standing Orders did not have to be changed for the Prime Minister to do that."

Privilege

•(1200)

What was the Liberal response? It was not cries of acknowledgement and acceptance, of a sudden realization that, good heavens, they could have been wrong all along and that the behavioural changes start and end at the top with no possible need to change the rules that govern this place. No, we saw the response yesterday. Unmoved by logical fallacy so clearly pointed out by members on this side of the House, the Liberals signalled their intention to move ahead with unilaterally changing the rules anyway, opposition be damned.

The Liberal House leader wants to shut down debate and discussion about their proposed changes and refuses to abide by hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition requiring unanimous consent of the House so that the Conservatives don't get "a veto" over government priorities.

It is difficult to believe the arrogance of the government and its disregard for the work done by all parties within the House. We negotiated in good faith. We made repeated overtures, together with the New Democratic Party, that would have set the table for negotiations for meaningful and tangible reforms to the way we conduct business in the House.

Our only precondition is that no move should be made without unanimous consent of all parties in the House, the time-honoured tradition of unanimous consent. The House leader ignored our olive branch because, she argues, it would give Conservatives a veto. I sometimes wish we did have a veto. Everything from wasteful spending to higher taxes to reforms that make life easier for Liberals and harder for everyone else would be struck down in a heartbeat. However, that is not how a majority government works. I accept that.

More importantly, that is not how respect for the institution of Parliament works. Our 99 seats on this side represent almost 10 million Canadians. True, not everyone voted for us, but we still represent those people. Do they not deserve equal representation over how our democracy works?

The disrespect for this institution personified by the members opposite is quite astounding. It brings me back to budget day 2017. Two members tried to get into Parliament for a vote, but were held up because the Prime Minister's media bus was deemed more important than the transportation of members of the House to get to work.

In response to this motion, the member for Winnipeg Centre said they should have just left earlier. That is disturbing. The statement given by the member for Winnipeg Centre demonstrates an unfortunate disregard and total disdain for anyone in the House who does not belong to the governing party. All problems would be solved in hindsight if they had left a little earlier, but sometimes things get in the way, like the Prime Minister's media bus.

Members should not be forced to miss a vote because the Prime Minister needs to saturate his media exposure. More importantly, the hundreds of thousands of Canadians that the members for Milton and Beauce represent absolutely should not have their voices dampened because the government says so.

For the first time in the history of Parliament, the government took the step of ending the debate before a vote could be called on it. It did not allow for the question of privilege to be decided on by members of the House. It was an unprecedented attack on the members of Parliament, so much so that the member for Perth—Wellington had to raise a question of privilege on the fact that the question of privilege was not voted on. He was successful in bringing that motion forward. I want to thank him for standing up for the rights of all members of Parliament, something the government is increasingly attacking.

The government House leader has said that her government is taking unprecedented action as it carries out its agenda. She is right. It is unprecedented for the government to cut off a debate on privilege. It is exceedingly rare for governments to ram through changes to the rules that govern our democracy. I am not sure this is the kind of infamy that the government House leader is referring to, but if her government continues to act without respect for this institution then it will truly be the legacy of the Liberal government and the Prime Minister, their disdain for democracy.

The government says it must push through on reforming the Standing Orders because it made the commitment to Canadians that it would modernize this place in the last election. That is truly laughable.

I do not have time to provide an exhaustive list of the government's broken promises, but to name a few, I ask members to remember the promise to run small \$10 billion deficits and to balance the budget in the fourth year of the mandate. That promise disappeared almost instantly.

Do members remember the commitment to transparency and accountability, particularly with regard to buying access to ministers through fundraisers? The Liberals were pretty quick to ditch that promise once they realized how much money they could raise by selling out ministers.

Do members remember the resolute commitment not to abuse taxpayer dollars? It seems that once the Liberals found out they could reward themselves with luxury car rides and help out a Liberal volunteer at the same time, it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Of course, there was electoral reform, a promise with much fanfare, touted with much praise. It was carried out over the course of several months and ultimately abandoned.

•(1205)

Does anyone remember why? We are told that, according to Liberals, there was no consensus on what reform should look like. Why is this situation different? Why is it that, when there is no consensus and doing nothing favours the Liberals, they are happy to break a campaign promise; yet when there is no consensus but moving forward is greatly beneficial to the government, they criticize the opposition for standing in their way? Why do the Liberals think it is acceptable to govern with such inconsistency?

We know where we stand. We know where our colleagues in the NDP stand. I am not sure the Liberal MPs know where their government stands. The only predictability behind the current government's actions can be summed up by the basic question: how does it best benefit the Liberals? That is what the government does. It does not work for Canadians. It does not work for the good of the country. It works for itself. It limits debate when it sounds bad for the government. It rams down changes designed to make it easier for the government to hide from accountability.

I think perhaps the fact that is most indicative of the shamefulness of the Liberals' actions is that the MP who speaks most often to this question is the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader and member for Winnipeg North. I do admire his oratory skills and I am sure he will get up and show off those skills again, but I have to ask why the other MPs are so keen to avoid speaking to something they know to be wrong. They are happy to defer speaking responsibility to the most outspoken member of their caucus, and I cannot blame them; I would not want to have to justify the actions of the current government either. That is one of the many reasons I sit on this side of the House as a Conservative.

The government continues to set new records, not on job creation or economic growth and not on things like making life easier for Canadians. The level of attack that the government has taken against the members of Parliament whose privileges were found to be violated in a *prima facie* case is unprecedented. I encourage all Liberal backbenchers to see the light and make the right choice when it comes time to vote on this issue.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member, there was some wandering there from the question at hand, but perhaps that is what happens when they talk to a question of privilege for seven days.

The point I would like to make is this. We all agree that we can clearly do better, and this is really a balance of the security—and I want to acknowledge the amazing security personnel we have here on the Hill who work very hard to keep us safe; we appreciate that and we want to thank them for their good work—and at the same time ensuring members get to the House safely in a timely manner, as security wants. Clearly, we can do better at that because I know that over the past couple of years this issue has taken place. This is not new to a Liberal government. This has happened a number of times in this place over the past couple of years.

Would the member not agree that what we want to do is to move this question to PROC, so that PROC can study this at an in-depth level, bring witnesses, and have questions at hand, so that we can do better at this? Would the member not support that PROC is the place to continue this debate so that we get to a resolution where security personnel continue to do their job and members get to be here on time and in a timely manner?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, there is no question in anyone's mind in this House that the security people do a very good job looking after us and keeping us safe. They do a fantastic job. The issue of the debate is twofold, to her question.

The voices from this side of the House, from the NDP, from the Bloc, and from us, have to be heard on such an unprecedented attack

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on the freedom of this House. It was not just a bus being blocked. It was not just two members not being here. It was the government trying to shut down the debate before there was even a vote on the subject. It is much bigger than just a simple bus.

Yes, we need to get this to PROC, but there are a lot of voices in this House that have to be heard. There are 184 government members. There are 150 members on this side of the House. Every single one of us was sent here by 100,000 people. They want us to talk on the important subjects, not just a bus but taxes, marijuana, and a lot of other issues. We are sent here for a reason, and the issue we are discussing today is that side of the House shutting down our ability to discuss and represent our constituents.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton West for his strong speech. He explained how important the work of an opposition party can be in our democratic process.

He described my colleague from Winnipeg North as a professional. That is true, because he consistently does the same thing whether he believes in it or not. A professional tennis player has to always play at his best even in the rain, even when his heart is not in it, even when he is tired.

Well, my colleague from Winnipeg North always goes full throttle no matter what we are talking about, because it is always the same thing. He comes to the defence of a well-established party that acts like royalty, with royal privileges and a royal attitude toward its entourage who prevent the poor ordinary members from speaking.

I wonder if the government is just trying to buy some time. Could it be that after presenting themselves during the election campaign as a youthful, marvellous, sunny, and progressive alternative, now they are not so sure what to do about all their pending promises and need to think long and hard about how to explain their deficits?

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, those are some very good points. The government has lost track.

Our colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington, commented earlier that he suspects it will eventually prorogue and try to reset. In every part of this, the government has lost its strategy and lost its way. I believe its attempt to ram through changes without unanimous consent on the way we deal with things in the House is a result of its inability to get the message out and inability to get work done properly in this House.

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Instead of facing the opposition and working with the opposition, presenting comprehensive, proper legislation, the government has decided to just change the rules and ram things through, getting its stuff through and just keeping going.

It is evident not only in the way the government is trying to change the Standing Orders but in the way it is dealing with the blocking of our colleagues, the members for Milton and for Beauce, and their inability to vote. Instead of addressing the issues, the government is trying to shut down debate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member. He said the government is blocking the members from being able to vote.

Let me make a suggestion. We need to go back to the beginning. Why are we debating this privilege today? It is because two members did not have unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

How did that happen? It happened because on budget day, well in advance, I believe the Conservatives wanted to adjourn debate. They caused the bells to ring. They are entitled. If they want to do something unprecedented, calling for a vote on the day of the budget, and it runs, in part, through the budget, that is completely their prerogative. I am not going to deny that or take it away from them. However, I assume the whips would have told the members that the vote was going to take place.

The issue is that we believe in unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. The reason why PROC is not studying the issue today is because the Conservatives continue to want to talk about it.

My question is very precise. Why are the members not allowing this to go to PROC today?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I addressed this earlier in a previous question.

Our ability to come to this House to debate and represent our constituents is so important that every single voice should be heard on this. This is not just a procedural matter about a bus being delayed so we should just move ahead.

Every single member, NDP, Bloc, Green Party, and Conservative, should have an opportunity to get up and state how important it is. I want to read a statement that is on our ID card:

Under the law of parliamentary privilege, the bearer has free and open access at all times, without obstruction or interference to the precincts of the House of Parliament of which the bearer is a member.

It is so important that we have this unfettered access to the House. It is not just a simple matter of two people being late. They were blocked from attending this House, and then the government tried to block debate on our ability to discuss the issue of our coming to this House and representing our constituents.

●(1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton West for his excellent remarks.

I am assuming that like all Edmontonians he is a big fan of the Oilers, whom we are very proud to see in the Stanley Cup playoffs. All Canadians should be applauding the success of the Senators and the Oilers.

Let us now turn to the subject of this motion. It is very important because it is about our democratic process in the House and the mandate we must honour, that is, speaking for the 100,000 people who live in our ridings. That is what the member for Milton and the member for Beauce wanted to do on the day of the budget. Unfortunately, they were unable to be present for an important vote because of a problem they experienced.

On this side of the House, we believe that any change in how MPs do their job must be made by consensus. I would like the member for Edmonton West to explain to the Liberal members why it is so important to have a consensus before making changes to how the House works.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. A part of the debate we are having is about changing the way we do business in the House and it is very important that we have unanimous consent. I do not always agree with my NDP colleagues nor my Liberal colleagues, but we cannot have the tyranny of the majority changing the rules for such an important democratic institution without all of us agreeing.

As much as the Liberals would like to believe otherwise, they are not going to be in power forever. What is going to stop the next government from overriding every single standing order, which the Liberal government is trying to do? What is going to stop the next government from trying to change the standing orders on the estimates, like the Liberal government has done, so that we have no parliamentary oversight on spending? The very reason quite arguably that the whole Westminster system exists is spending oversight. They have tried to change it before. What is to stop anyone once we have set this precedent of the tyranny of the majority to change any rule that they want at any time? It takes away the purpose of this building's existence. We cannot allow that to happen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me today to speak to this motion. I will be sharing my time with the member for Essex, a young MP who was elected in the last election in 2015, just as I was. She is an extraordinary woman who was very involved in her community before she became an MP. I do not want to speak for her, but I know that she vigorously and passionately speaks to the issues that are important to her community, just as she did when she was a candidate. Like me, she believes in democracy and the democratic process in the House.

When I was elected, I came here with all kinds of ideas and issues, but above all I wanted to be transparent, to speak on behalf of every person in the riding of Jonquière. On the weekend, there was a big march in Dolbeau-Mistassini in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region. It was a gathering of amazing workers who came together for one common purpose. They were united for the forest, and they want the government to stand up for the forestry industry. We know a crisis is looming. Unfortunately, thousands of jobs may be lost if the government does not take action. I am proud to be the voice of the people of Jonquière here in the House.

Getting back to the subject at hand, our job as MPs is to be here in the House to speak up about issues that matter to the people we represent. That applies to MPs for all 338 ridings. Our primary duty is to represent people. I belong to a political party that I am proud of, the NDP, a party whose values I embrace in all aspects of my life and my work. Above all, what matters most are the people.

When we come to Ottawa and we are called upon to vote, we should not be obstructed in any way. I would like to recognize the extraordinary work done by the security forces on the Hill. As a new member, I often got lost in this big, beautiful city, and especially on the Hill, with its countless offices. The security officers were always there for me. Even when I was worried, they were there to reassure me. I would therefore like to recognize the extraordinary work that they do for us.

After the dramatic events that unfolded here, they always have to be on guard. It is not easy to always be on high alert. I want to commend them and thank them on behalf of all my colleagues. They take care of us and allow us to perform our duties, to have full access so we can come to the House and vote. That is why it is important to have this debate.

When I come to the House I expect members to listen to what I have to say. We are all equal. Whether we are members of the government or the opposition, we have the right to speak. Our comments must be taken into account.

Accordingly, the government cannot just say that it has a majority and it was elected by Canadians to represent them. It is true that the government is part of Parliament, but major changes require a consensus. Members of the House have different opinions. We do not always have to fully agree with one another, but we need to at least come to a consensus.

● (1220)

We need to remember the importance of being in the House and the importance of committees. Things happen on many levels. There are many complex procedures and, as a new member, I must admit that I still have some trouble understanding them all. However, we are fortunate to have extraordinary people, including the clerks, to help us keep the House running smoothly. I trust the various bodies. If they have been trained and have always worked, we should stay the course. However, we do not want a repeat of this situation.

I heard a number of stories in the House about things that have happened in the past. I was not here, given that I was elected in 2015. If similar things have already happened in the past, why would we not work constructively and make the necessary changes? We all need to be consulted and be part of the process. Indeed, all members

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of all political parties must be part of the process. We are the voice of Canadians.

In my opinion, an MP's job is first and foremost to represent the people in his or her riding. My constituents believe that I have a forum where I can speak my mind, that I can vote freely, and that it is easy for me to access Parliament Hill. They also believe that I can be held accountable.

When I go to my riding, I meet with people from a strong and vibrant community. The riding is home to the Knights of Columbus, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Daughters of Isabella, and many other dynamic organizations that host a wide range of activities. I have the opportunity to interact and talk with my constituents.

Over the past two weeks, the people in my riding have been asking me difficult questions. Everything moves quickly in the House. We experience it on a daily basis. However, the process may seem complex to ordinary Canadians. They are wondering what is happening and where their democracy is headed because no one is asking their opinion. Do they feel as though they are well represented? Yes, because they know that every MP in the House is working for them.

I spoke earlier about the great work that is being done by the member for Essex. She works hard and is very passionate about her work. We are all doing our part because we have a common objective, a common goal. In order to reach that goal, we must be able to express ourselves and to vote.

I hope that the members of the House will be able to continue to work together. We must break down barriers, whether we agree or not. The important thing is not only to remember everything that has happened but also to resolve the problem once and for all. We need to give all members the opportunity to express themselves, whether we agree with what they have to say or not. The opinions of members on both sides of the House must be taken into consideration. I believe that this is the very essence of many of the speeches that have been given in the House.

Freedom of expression is extremely important. Members' votes and speeches must be taken into account. Members need to have full and unfettered access to the House of Commons. No member should be prevented from voting, and no member should be prevented from speaking on behalf of his or her constituents.

● (1225)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Jonquière for her very good speech. I pretty much agree with her with respect to this matter and also the good comments by the member for Essex.

I would like to speak briefly about the issue before us. We want to study why access to the Hill was blocked once again. This should not have happened. I was here when Mr. Godin, the former NDP member for Acadie-Bathurst, was prevented from entering the chamber. I saw him through the window and I heard the entire conversation. It was ridiculous. Why was he prevented from accessing the Hill for pretty much the same reasons as in the most recent incident?

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The procedure and House affairs committee made recommendations to address the problem, but they have yet to be implemented. I would like to ask those who were to fix the problem why that has not yet happened. It makes no sense. I agree with what the member said.

Why must we wait to submit the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs? Why not do it now?

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comment and his question.

I was not here when that happened. When I was sworn in, I was given an ID card that was to be visible at all times in order for me to have access to every building on the Hill. It is important to identify oneself. I have a lot of admiration for the work that our officers do. They recognize us now. They know our faces and our names by heart. It is quite amazing, really. I cannot even remember all my colleagues' names. Their visual acuity is remarkable.

I was not here for the events that my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle mentioned. We need assurances of clear and precise commitments if this file is to be referred to committee. Will the committee's recommendations truly be taken into consideration and applied to ensure that this never happens again? Will any real changes be made? Any change will have to be made with the unanimous consent of the House and we must all be involved in the process.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this privilege motion also deals with the agenda and practices of PROC. We need to know what kind of a study will happen at PROC.

Something quite unprecedented happened this morning at PROC. In the middle of the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston trying to raise a point of order, the committee was immediately adjourned, without the consent of the committee. The chair unilaterally adjourned the meeting in the middle of the discussion as that member was calling a point of order, and there was absolutely no response to that.

Therefore, clearly what happened was the chair of the PROC committee read a script. We do not know who gave him that script. I suspect the government House leader will be more reluctant to take the credit for this than the defence minister was to take the credit for other things. However, the chair was reading a script and the meeting was adjourned, without the committee being consulted, while someone was trying to raise a point of order.

In light of what has happened at PROC, I wonder if the member could comment on the complete disregard we have seen for our democratic process in this chamber and at the procedure and House affairs committee. Could she comment on what expectation we can have of having that study work effectively in that kind of committee environment?

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comment.

I was not at the committee meeting this morning. I was here in the House, but I did hear about what happened. I found it very strange. This is a perfect example of how the government does not care about consensus or about making sure that all parties are included in the process. Make no mistake: despite what is happening in the House right now and the subject of this debate, the government is still unilaterally calling the shots. There is no consensus and no discussion.

We have to be able to express ourselves. Of course there have to be rules in place, but it has to be done in a way that leads to consensus. Here in the House, we have confidence, but what kind of clear mandate will we send if there is a committee? Will we still have confidence? Will there still be credibility? Are people saying whatever they want just to look good, say the right words, and get some nice photo ops? That is not good enough. We have to make sure that what happened never happens again. This has to be more than lip service. There has to be meaningful action.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Jonquière for her kind words. I know how hard she fought to come to the House, to take her seat, and to be able to speak as she did today, not only on this question of privilege but on many different issues. I appreciate the work she has done in representing her constituents here and taking that role very seriously.

I am pleased to rise today to debate this question of privilege. I must note that not all members will be able to give a speech on the question of privilege because the government House leader has invoked closure for the second time. That means many members who had planned to speak later today will be unable to do so and in a sense have their privilege breached as well because they will be unable to stand in the House and give wonderful speeches, like I just heard from my colleague from Jonquière.

We are here because the member for Milton and the member for Beauce were attempting to make their way to this place for a vote on budget day. Unfortunately, they were unable to make it because the parliamentary buses were blocked from picking them up at the bus stop due to the Prime Minister's passing motorcade, which we learned was empty at the time. This prevented my two colleagues from performing their duties as elected representatives.

Voting is a very important part of our job. Having our voting privileges breached is serious and warrants debate in the House. This is not the first time we have debated this question of privilege. The first time, the Liberals closed down the debate on this important issue and then we had the Speaker rule against that closure, saying it was not within the rules of the House. He stated that our Standing Orders clearly stated that questions of privilege took precedence over everything else.

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Unfortunately, we find ourselves today with the same heavy-handed tactic. The government House leader today invoked closure once again to shut down this debate. This has never been done in the House before and the arrogance of this move is unprecedented.

I have a great deal of respect for members of the Parliamentary Protective Services and I tip my hat to them. They work to hard to ensure MPs' privileges, rights, and duties are supported. I have a lot of respect for the drivers of the buses that shuttle us around the parliamentary precinct and all the staff on them.

The question of privilege is not about laying fault on these workers. We have the RCMP in the House that answers solely to the government. Earlier when the government House leader said that we needed answers, all she had to do was ask the RCMP, which is under the government's purview, what happened and the Liberals would have the answer. We need an absolute guarantee that this will never happen again.

The issue at hand is that MPs were prevented from performing their duties. Why did this happen? Why were the buses prevented from bringing MPs to this place? Did the Prime Minister's team know what was happening? Is there a potential that this could happen again? We need answers to these questions. As I mentioned, the Speaker previously found a prima facie breach of privilege for a reason.

Clearly this matter should be studied further at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, but, and this is an important but, we should not shut down debate in the House on privilege in order to do so. The government continues to quash debate on the question of privilege. Instead of allowing Parliament to freely debate the breach of members' ability to move freely about the precinct, once again the Liberals are shutting down the debate.

At the same time this place debates parliamentary privileges, our colleagues at the procedure and House affairs committee are filibustering the government's attempt to unilaterally change the Standing Orders and the rules for how Parliament functions. The problem is that the government is trying to change the rules to benefit the Liberals by taking away power from the opposition and giving more power to the government. This is anti-democratic, especially in a system such as ours where the government already holds a significant amount of power. The rules we have are part of our system of checks and balances to prevent this type of abuse from happening.

Why would the government put an end to this type of debate is a question many of us on this side of the House are asking. I would dare say that some members on the opposite side of the House are also asking this question and do not condone this behaviour in the House of Commons.

For those members on the Liberal side who are new parliamentarians, as I am, I ask them to think about their privilege being breached, and the privilege of the people they were sent to represent, by not having access to the Hill for a vote. Would they not want the ability to fully debate it? I know my colleagues on this side of the House want the ability to debate this and that is why we find a full speaker's list, even though we know the Liberals are shutting down debate once again through closure on this.

●(1235)

What the Liberals are doing in the House is a complete and utter power grab. I want them to think seriously about this behaviour and how Canadians feel about this blatant disrespect of those of us elected to be in the House.

Being able to come here and do our jobs every day is vital to the ability we have to represent our ridings. That is why we call it privilege. Shutting down debate on our ability to do our work sends a clear message to Canadians about the priorities of the Liberals in silencing anyone who does not agree with them. That is the role of the opposition in this place and as the opposition, we have tools available to us to hold the government to account.

In fact, one of the first things we are all provided with is the big green book, our parliamentary bible by O'Brien and Bosc. This book of procedure provides new parliamentarians with all we need to perform to the best of our ability. I have learned so much from these rules in the past 18 months, which allow me to represent my riding with dignity and integrity.

I am not a person who gives up easily. That is probably a large reason why I sit here today and maybe that is why I appreciate these tools and place such a huge importance on them. When I am looking for the best way to fulfill my role as a parliamentarian. I am often led to that big green book, looking to use every tool available to me. I am certain that is exactly what is expected of me by everyone who voted to send me here.

I mentioned earlier that as a new parliamentarian I attended a luncheon in the beautiful Sir John A. Macdonald Building across the way with all new parliamentarians. Our newly minted Prime Minister bounded into the room, went up onto the stage with his shirtsleeves rolled up, grabbed the mic, and promised us all that things would be different, that he would listen, that there would be a dramatic difference from the previous prime minister. He promised that the opposition would be respected and heard.

Although I optimistically thought this difference would be positive as promised, it has become crystal clear that this was a bad omen of things to come. Things are different, but not in a positive way for Canadians. That moment, with the Prime Minister coming in, has taken up permanent residency in my memory. Often I have to rise in the House to express my shock at the incredible about-face he has now taken.

I can honestly say that it has become quite clear to me that the Prime Minister is quite comfortable saying one thing and doing another. He said that he would never use omnibus bills. He is using an omnibus bill. He said that this would be the last election under first past the post, but we all know that will not be the case. He said that he would listen and respect the opposition. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could highlight this behaviour more than what has been displayed in the House lately.

Here we are again today with MPs who were elected to represent Canadians fighting for respect in the House. The House should be a place of the highest respect, not a battlefield for constitutional rights.

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I have risen in the House on my own question of privilege, so I understand well the way that breach of privilege affects our work in the House.

There is a pattern of disrespect and disdain in the House for the opposition and that needs to end. It is a poison that will ultimately harm the best interests of Canadians. The House of Commons has become a poisonous workplace that is tainted by cynical buzzwords from the government.

It started with the attempted power grab last year with Motion No. 6, which the government wisely abandoned. Now we have a new government House leader, but she has been standing in the House acting as though the Liberals have the authority to change everything.

I have to believe even members opposite ran to do better. Today they are being tested on the commitment, which I heard the newly minted Prime Minister promise us all.

We have a constitutional right to be here to vote and debate with unfettered access. This debate should be allowed to continue until such a time as it collapses, not when the Liberals think it should end but when all parliamentarians have had the privilege of having their say.

• (1240)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her passion, particularly with the question of ensuring that all members of Parliament have unfettered access to this place.

I would like to remind everyone in the House that this is day seven of this debate and this is not the first time this issue has arisen. As I have said, over the past number of years this issue has arisen on a few occasions.

Is it not time now to have this matter studied at PROC?

As a new member of PROC, there was some mention of the chair. We have just come through three weeks of a filibuster in PROC and I cannot think of a chair or witnessed a chair who is more attentive and dedicated than the chair of PROC. PROC would willingly take this on and investigate this important matter.

Would the member not agree that in light of the fact that this has happened repeatedly in this place, is it not time now, after seven days, for further investigation and that a wholesome and full investigation take place at PROC?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, the time for this to move on is when debate collapses, when there is not one more person in this House who wants to rise and be heard on this important matter. That is the time. It is not for the member opposite or the government House leader or me to decide that. It is for the rules of this House which say that as long as members stand to speak to an issue, we continue to debate.

We must respect the rules of this House, and not push forward on our individual needs. We need to look at what is best for Canadians. When every member has finished speaking, that is the point when we will talk about where this goes further.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just heard a member of the government talk about the work of the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee.

I want to say that generally, I think that member does very good work. Generally speaking, I appreciate the work that he does in this place. However, we had an incident this morning, which I mentioned, and I think the member was aware of it because she was present when it happened. The chair adjourned the meeting without consulting the committee on that issue whatsoever, even though previously, the government had said it cannot adjourn a meeting without the consent of the committee. This was clearly politically driven. The government did not want to give the opposition the opportunity at the committee to talk about the issues in terms of the Standing Orders and to respond to what the government House leader was doing.

I do not fault the chair of PROC. He was reading a script. I do not know who gave him that script. I do not know where he got those notes. I do know there were a number of very senior staff associated with the government House leader there keenly observing everything that the chair did. He read the script.

There was an active point of order being raised by a member of the Conservative Party. That point of order was ignored and the meeting was ended.

In light of what clearly appears to be some strong direction from the government House leader to the detailed minutiae of what is happening at PROC even to try to prevent a point of order from coming forward, what does the member think is going to happen at PROC after the closure motion is brought to a vote and the issue proceeds to PROC for consideration?

• (1245)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, in my speech I spoke about respect, and the lack of respect for the rules of this place and the rules of committees that exist in this place. As long as we continue to have this pattern where rules are thrown to the side and the government does whatever it deems to be the thing of the day to do, whatever it is it wants to do that particular day, we are going to continue to have a poisonous workplace here. None of us can sit confidently in our seat knowing that we can use the rules that are provided in this House, that we have all agreed to, and be able to represent the people who have sent us here.

When this leaks over into committees, we start to have this culture of disrespect, this culture where members feel they cannot represent the people who have sent them here. It is that deep lack of respect that is creating cynicism in this House, cynicism that does not belong here, cynicism that the Liberal government and our Prime Minister promised would not be here in this Parliament when he came and spoke to us.

Privilege

The Liberals need to remember a time not long ago when they sat in this corner, and there were not that many members sitting here in opposition, and how important those tools were to them. I believe it is incumbent upon the members who were sitting here at that time to convey that to the new members so that they understand that elections can change our position and seat in this House very easily. When that happens, members do not want their rights to be violated in the way the government is violating all of our rights.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join the growing ranks of opposition members imploring our colleagues on the government side of the aisle to vote for the motion to send the question of privilege to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Before getting to the substance of the debate, though, I am going to start by explaining a bit of the background for the benefit of the people of Calgary Rocky Ridge who may be watching today but have not followed this debate on ParlVU or CPAC and may be wondering what this is all about.

Today's debate is about a question of privilege. Just as power is coupled with responsibility, responsibilities must come with the powers necessary to execute them. When members of Parliament are elected, they are charged with the responsibility to represent their constituents in the House of Commons. In order to fulfill this responsibility, we enjoy certain tools and powers by law and a convention called parliamentary privilege. When they hear the word "privilege", Canadians might think in positive terms about the special things that people are able to enjoy or do, or in negative terms about things that only certain people get to enjoy without having earned them. When members of Parliament speak of their privileges, they are talking about the tools they need to do their jobs.

It is a fundamental principle of western democracy, especially in Westminster-style parliaments, that process matters just as much as results do. Whether it is a due process of law returning a conviction in court, or parliamentary procedure allowing passage of the law under which charges are laid, the process matters. Parliamentary privileges are an integral part of the means by which Parliament governs Canada. They are far more important than the agenda of any given government since they endure while governments come and go.

This topic received considerable discussion before our recent constituency weeks, so I am going to keep my summary brief. On budget day the member for Milton and the member for Beauce were not able to get to the House of Commons on time to vote since the parliamentary precinct buses were obstructed at the security entrance. This infringed on their right to be here to represent their constituents, so they raised a question of privilege.

The Speaker looked into the matter and found that there was a *prima facie* case for a breach of privilege, and then the member for Milton moved the appropriate motion to refer the matter to the procedure and House affairs committee. A debate about the exact cause of the blocked buses then ensued. My friend from Beauce recounted that the Parliamentary Protective Service told him that the Prime Minister's empty motorcade exiting Parliament Hill caused the delay. If there is any doubt regarding these remarks, it should not be difficult to track down the constable to whom the member inquired and ask him or her directly, but the House of Commons is not a

court. It does not have the power to call witnesses and examine testimony; PROC does. This matter should go to PROC, where witnesses can be summoned and the constable who told the member for Beauce about the Prime Minister's motorcade can appear and face questions for the record and where the Speaker's report on his investigation can be parsed line by line until Parliament has a precise and accurate picture of the day's events.

Given that a case like this arose a few years ago, it should have been obvious that the matter should have immediately gone to PROC for a full review. Although I was not a member of Parliament when Yvon Godin raised his question of privilege about being blocked from attending the House due to security measures for a visiting dignitary, I am going to join my colleagues in mentioning that the matter was immediately referred to PROC where it immediately took precedence over the other business on the agenda at that committee at that time. That was the correct thing to do then and it is the correct thing to do now.

It follows the folkways and customs of this House, as my friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston called them. It upholds the centuries-old tradition of the Standing Orders, yet strangely enough, the Liberals have argued against the motion to refer the question of privilege to PROC and the amendment to have the question take priority over other matters currently before the committee. They even accused the loyal opposition of making this into a partisan issue by discussing the member for Beauce's account of the events.

I for one do not allege malice or intent to breach the parliamentary privilege on the part of the Prime Minister. I do not accuse him of intentionally obstructing access through tactical use of his motorcade. Indeed, from my reading of the Speaker's report, this incident looks like a case of bureaucratic processes that resulted in an innocent and unwitting combination of events resulting in the breach of privilege, yet the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader in his replies displayed a degree of defensiveness that would be unwarranted in this situation were it merely an egregious example of miscommunication and procedural breakdown without the partisan element.

● (1250)

I agree with my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I think this parliamentary secretary doth protest too much, yet his protests and defensiveness is all the more reason to get the matter to PROC for a full investigation, not to impugn or condemn the Prime Minister for contemptuous partisan tactics, but to determine the actual cause of the incident and thereby potentially clear him of any suspicion by association with these events.

Privilege

The government House leader and her parliamentary secretary's ability and willingness to stand up day after day and defend the government's policies and actions in the face of justified criticism are appalling. Indeed, the parliamentary secretary to the government House of leader is steadfast and stalwart at stonewalling against calls for transparency, deftly dodging and deflecting attempts to hold the government accountable. Such a talent is strangely impressive, but this is not the time for him to exercise his uniquely dubious talent and his imperviousness to shame.

Breaches of parliamentary privilege which prevent members from representing our constituents go beyond any temporary part of the struggle of the day. They go to the very root of constitutional representative government, Westminster-style parliamentary procedure, and what in the 19th century was understood as responsible government.

The incident before us today need not and should not be a partisan or policy matter for debate in the chamber. It is an important procedural matter, over which PROC has authority, and blocking its immediate referral to PROC and preventing it from taking priority over other matters at that committee turns this from a serious procedural matter into another partisan point.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House of leader expressed concern about PROC's ability to address the matter, given the tenor of debate in the House so far. We can have a discussion on how well standing committees function in this Parliament, but that topic is a distraction from the point at hand. Whether or not PROC functions as effectively as we would all like is not relevant, because it remains the only proper venue for questions of privilege.

Two opposition members missing a vote on the budget when the government has a majority might not seem like an important issue to many Canadians, but failing to address this matter properly now, when the government was not set to stand or fall on two votes, opens the door to unscrupulous tactics by future governments on critical confidence votes. I am not given to hyperbole or slippery slope arguments, but I must mention that disregarding this question of privilege in refusing to refer the matter to PROC has set a very dangerous precedent.

As other members have mentioned, the legal right of members of Parliament to attend the House of Commons goes back many centuries to a time when the king tried to arrest members to stop them from attending the House or to stop them from voting. The mace, which is present in the House when we sit and is part of our daily ceremony, is a symbol of these hard-won privileges. It was a defensive weapon to symbolize and remember how parliamentarians once needed to resist the power of the crown, its government and its agents by force. The mace is a symbol of how the common people of Canada are represented by members of Parliament, and that the government has no power over them other than through the consent of this House.

I do not believe that parties which exist today would deliberately try to physically prevent members from fulfilling their parliamentary duties, but it is foolish to trust in the goodwill of future generations. The origin and evolution of these privileges through the centuries underscore the importance of protecting them.

If the Liberals get away with not investigating a breach of privilege at this time, a future government might try to subtly, or not so subtly, block opposition MPs from attending the House to vote, and then brush aside criticism by correctly claiming that they were only following the precedent that is attempted to be set by not referring this privilege to committee.

Speaking of dangerous precedents, on the first day of debate on this question of privilege, the Liberals did something hitherto unseen in Westminster parliaments. They cut off the debate on privilege by moving to proceed to the orders of the day. As my friend from Perth—Wellington observed, “Never before in the history of this place has a matter of privilege been dealt with in such a way. Never before in this place has the government shut down and prevented all 338 members of this House from voting on a matter of the privileges of us as parliamentarians. Every other case of privilege has been dealt with one way or another through a vote, either in the affirmative or in the negative, but not in this case.”

Such disrespect for Canada's parliamentary traditions and procedures might not strike the viewers at home as especially momentous. It may look to them like a government just trying to get on with governing, like a government trying to skirt an obstacle in the name of efficiency, but such inefficiency is a necessary check and balance in a democratic form of government.

● (1255)

Democracies are not built for speed but for reasoned deliberation and representation. By shutting down debate on a matter of privilege that goes to the very root of representative government, the Liberals have done serious and potentially irreparable harm to Parliament.

The Liberal government did not stop at one precedent that undermined the foundation of Canada's democratic institutions. As my colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington, identified on April 7, the Liberals tried to circumvent customary practice at PROC itself. Instead of voting on a motion from the House of Commons to refer this motion of privilege to PROC, and thus to order PROC to investigate it immediately, the Liberals tried to have PROC initiate its own study for the matter without an official charge from the House.

Privilege

This point may seem to be fairly obscure for Canadians not immersed in parliamentary procedure, but it is worth explaining. Standing committees may initiate their own studies with a motion, but they may also discontinue or interrupt those studies with another motion. This means that an important question of privilege could be set aside whenever the Liberal majority on PROC felt like it instead of being addressed immediately and fully, as a charge from the House of Commons would require. The Liberals tried to escape a question of privilege by taking it from mandatory to discretionary, thus allowing it to be discarded at their convenience.

I turn my attention to the topic of PROC as the proper venue for investigations of matters of privilege. I appreciate how delicately my friend from York—Simcoe made the case to Parliament to have access to all the evidence on which the Speaker based his initial finding of a prima facie breach of privilege, so I will echo his remarks. In discussing the Speaker's finding of fact, he said:

Those findings were in reports that were apparently made available to the Speaker. I have not seen those. I do not believe they have been tendered to this House, yet they were the evidentiary basis on which the Speaker's finding was made.

I agree with him that PROC is better suited, and indeed is authorized, for the role of fact-finder, rather than the Speaker, despite the entirely reasonable need for the Speaker to gather facts on which to base a prima facie finding of breach of privilege. Members of Parliament, and by extension, the constituents we represent, have a right to know how our parliamentary privileges are upheld. That right includes access to facts and testimony surrounding incidents of breach, and that access is best granted through PROC.

With respect to my colleague from Beauce's amendment to the motion before us today, I understand that PROC is currently seized with the question regarding proposed changes to the Standing Orders. However, enforcing existing Standing Orders takes precedence over discussing amendments or innovations. It is like arguing over the new rigging for a sinking ship. Repairing and ensuring immediate security and safety has to take priority over redesign.

The remarks of the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert get to the heart of the government's resistance to this motion. On April 6, she said:

We will not allow the Conservatives to play politics with the rights and privileges of members of Parliament. This is just too important. We will also not let them try to block a study on how we modernize the rules of the House of Commons.

What a ridiculous mischaracterization of what is happening. It is as if she is suggesting, with a straight face and without a hint of irony, that the Conservatives, as well as the other opposition parties, are playing politics by asking PROC to investigate how two members of Parliament were prevented from voting on a budget bill, a confidence motion, when you, Mr. Speaker, had issued a ruling finding a prima facie case of breach of privilege, and that by denying such a referral, against all precedence, somehow the government is not playing politics. She is basically saying that it is not that important if duly elected members of Parliament cannot get to the House to vote on the budget, but ramming through changes to the Standing Orders without all-party consent, contrary to all precedents and convention, so that the government can dodge democratic accountability is important.

Canadians elected us with an expectation that we would follow the rules, not change them to suit whoever is in power at a particular moment. Canadians expect us to respect our democratic institutions. Governments in civilized countries do not get to make up the rules whenever they want to. Well-structured governments have clear rules, with clear procedures to change them. They also have built in checks and balances. Canada's governing institutions have become more and more centralized over the past 50 years, especially since the first Prime Minister Trudeau. More power has passed from the House of Commons to cabinet as the roles of individual MPs have shrunk.

● (1300)

We are now at the point where the only real power opposition MPs and governing party backbenchers have in the House is moral suasion through debate, an appeal to the government's conscience through the power to question, and the power of delay. Other than these very limited powers, the government can pass any law it wants between elections, and the current government wants to reduce these final, very limited powers MPs have to represent their voters.

April 6 was an especially bad day in terms of patronizing Liberal nonsense that treats Canadians and their elected representatives as children. The member for Winnipeg Centre went so far as to lecture this House and two parliamentary veterans on the need to plan their days to get to the chamber more quickly. He lectured them on his own experiences with the parliamentary bus, including his attempt to disembark away from a designated stop. When my colleagues spoke out to express their concern for his safety in attempting to do so, he referred back to his days as an elementary school teacher managing first- and second-grade children, thus implying that fellow members of Parliament were no better self-managers than six-year-old children.

Such comments are outrageously insulting to our hon. colleagues. However, the member for Winnipeg Centre's school metaphor may be useful. Does a student deserve a lecture on punctuality if he or she dutifully waits for the bus but arrives late, because the bus was blocked by the police at the only intersection the bus could cross to get the student to school? Of course not.

Privilege

It is bad enough that the member insulted fellow MPs, but far more disturbing was the member for Winnipeg Centre's undermining of your authority, Mr. Speaker. He might have denied any intent in doing so, but his later statements contradict him. By brushing off the need to debate, by lecturing other members on punctuality, and by diverting attention from a breach of privilege to the need for a positive work environment, he effectively dismissed your finding of a prima facie case of breach of privilege, a finding that is always accompanied by a motion referring the matter to PROC. This is another example of Liberal arrogance, of telling Canadians that results matter more than process. Unlike the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert, he was subtle. He did not boldly declare that the Liberals will not allow a question of privilege to interfere with their plans to reform Parliament in their own image and will trample all due process in their way. Instead, he insinuated that this topic is not worthy of Parliament's attention and that debating it was a waste of time. While I agree with him that it is a waste of time to debate a motion that custom dictates should pass, I can safely speak for my Conservative colleagues, and perhaps even for the NDP, in saying that we would end debate if the Liberals agreed to do what is always done with questions of privilege and send this matter to PROC. We are not the problem here.

To conclude, I urge my colleagues on the government benches to remember that they will be on this side of the aisle sooner or later. In fact, there are a number of members on the government side of this House who have spent time over here. There are even a few veterans who have been on both sides of this chamber, before the 42nd Parliament, who know full well just how outrageous the current situation is and that it is untenable. I will not embarrass them by calling them out. I do not want any of them to suffer or have conflict with their own colleagues and House officers for speaking out and speaking up for what is right.

I implore my Liberal colleagues who are new to this place, as I am, to seek the wisdom of their own colleagues who have experience here. I know that many of the experienced members on the backbenches know that what their House leader and her parliamentary secretary are doing is wrong. Parliamentarians of all stripes know that one should never do in government what one denounces in opposition. One should never set precedents for temporary partisan gain if it undermines parliamentary institutions and erodes the very foundations of our form of government. I encourage them to vote for this motion and its amendment and send this matter to PROC.

●(1305)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My colleague gave a great speech about how the government is not respecting our democracy, yet in the midst of that, I believe we have fallen below quorum in this House, and I ask you to observe that.

The Deputy Speaker: We now have quorum. Within the reasonable time it takes, understanding that members are sometimes close by the chamber, it appears that we do have quorum, so we will continue with questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader .

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I will have to wait a moment for the member who gave the speech to reappear so I can put forward my question.

The Deputy Speaker: The parliamentary secretary will know that we do not reference the absence or presence of a member in the House, who, in this case, was absent. I will ask the hon. member to carry on but to avoid those kinds of characterizations.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, can the member indicate when he believes the Conservatives will be ready for the vote?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, this whole debate has not been a very positive reflection on this institution. We know what has been going on at the procedure and House affairs committee for weeks now. We know what the member and the House leader have been trying to impose on this House. We merely ask that the government and the member respect this institution. This will eventually go to PROC and will be sorted out. Let us have some respect for the Standing Orders of this House.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, something we have all talked about today is respect for the rules of this place. When we came here as parliamentarians, we were provided with the rules of the House. We all understand that these are the rules we all must govern ourselves by when we take our seats in the House, however long we sit here as members. We are being told by members on the opposite side that we cannot use those rules, that we cannot continue to debate in the House on a question of privilege, when clearly, many of us on this side of the House would like to add our voices to this very important debate.

Can the member speak to how he thinks Canadians and his constituents feel when they see this lack of respect in the House of Commons, where they sent him to represent them?

●(1310)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the member makes excellent points, as she did in her speech before me.

Members of my constituency certainly expect that I have the ability to speak on their behalf, that debate will not be limited by the government, and especially that I have the ability to come to the House to vote on a budget, no less, on a confidence motion. I can only imagine what kind of consternation we would be going through had those two votes been decisive in maintaining the confidence or not in the government. This is an extremely important issue, and my constituents take it very seriously.

It is as if the government thinks we are an audience, that we are here to watch it govern, but we all won our seats, just as Liberals won their seats. We were elected by the people of our ridings to attend this House and to participate in debate, not to watch.

Privilege

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the opposition day designated for Thursday, May 4 has been undesignated and will now take place on Monday, May 8.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we need some reality in terms of what the member across the way said. He consistently calls it a budget confidence vote. What the member needs to realize is that what precipitated the members not having access was not a budget confidence vote. The Conservative Party wanted to go to orders of the day to interfere with the presentation of the national federal budget. That is why we were having the vote. It was not a confidence vote, and it is important to recognize that. Why is it important to recognize that? It is because what we have witnessed over the last number of days on a matter of privilege is that the members of the Conservative Party have admitted that they are filibustering. If a matter of privilege is as important as we believe it is in the Liberal caucus, the Conservatives would recognize—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My friend from Winnipeg North is very familiar with the rules. He should know, at a minimum, that a motion to move to the orders of the day is moved by the government, not the opposition. He is now saying somehow that the missing of the vote was less of a big deal because it was not that important a vote. That is the implication. It was a vote not moved by the opposition. It was a vote—

The Deputy Speaker: I am certain these matters fall under the rubric of debate. I am sure members will have the opportunity to get to that in some other part of our discussion here today.

We will let the hon. parliamentary secretary finish his question. Then we will get on with questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the point is that when members stand and talk about something, they need to be consistent. There are many examples I could use that have not been factual. The opposition, yes, is working together, and I applaud that. It would appear that the NDP and the Conservatives are united in trying to filibuster. At least I have heard the Conservatives admit they are trying to filibuster on it. If they believe, as we believe, in unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct, why do they continue to debate this here and not send it to committee? Why not allow it to go to committee?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, that is somewhat disingenuous on the part of the parliamentary secretary when the Liberals themselves tried to prevent the question of privilege from even going to a vote and are now wondering why so many of us want to debate this question of privilege.

Setting that aside, if he listened carefully to my speech, he would have been reminded that the power to delay is one of the very limited powers an opposition party has. When a government behaves as outrageously, as ridiculously, and as disrespectfully to the institution of Parliament as the present government has, delay of the passage of bills is one of the only ways our opposition parties can draw attention to what is going on over here and to prevent it from doing so. We hope to evoke in the conscience of these members just how ridiculous the Liberals' conduct is so they will finally do the right thing.

● (1315)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in light of the history with the present government, what happened in PROC this morning, the shutting down of debate, invoking closure, and removing opposition days, does my colleague have any confidence whatsoever that these issues will actually be dealt with at PROC?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. One can always hope things will prevail at PROC, that PROC will do the right thing, which is to immediately take on the question of privilege, abandon its agenda to ram through changes to the Standing Orders, and deal with the real question of privilege that prevented two elected members from voting.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to be crystal clear, because it was a major theme of the member's comments, and accuracy is important. It is important we recognize that on budget day, the Conservative Party made a move to have us to go to orders of the day, thereby interrupting the budget.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's not true. You moved the order—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, that is true, Mr. Speaker. Reality will show that. Look at the *Journals*. Members will see that it is true.

We are not denying the importance of unfettered access. What I am asking the member across the way to recognize is that there is also a responsibility for opposition members to behave in a responsible manner. Some of the things we have seen, such as an opposition wanting to filibuster a matter of privilege, is questionable at best in terms of good opposition.

I sat in opposition for over 20 years and I did not participate in that sort of a filibuster on a privilege for seven days.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I think that is a question he asked in his earlier intervention. It is disingenuous on his part to wonder why opposition members would want to weigh in on debate on this question when the present government tried to take an unprecedented step, never attempted in the history of Westminster-style parliaments, to bury a question of privilege without a vote.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from North Island—Powell River.

Privilege

I have been listening to the debate and find this quite appalling. I am disappointed at how sterile our deliberations have become, simply because this government seems to need some intense psychotherapy. It has an acute superiority complex.

Clearly, this does not seem to stop my colleague opposite from talking over me and believing that what he has to say is relevant. That is what is funny. He talks non-stop, like a machine. It is like a car alarm that will not stop ringing. Still, no matter what we are talking about, he always has the same perspective. That is typical of this government, which got elected by saying just about anything.

The young members who are in government for the first time cannot believe how badly they have been taken for a ride. They are simply clinging on to that old ideal of the “natural governing party”. Come on. It is appalling that the Liberals pulled such a fast one on Canadian voters. This government came along with an approach based on communications and spin, promising the moon and the stars, and sugar-coating everything.

I would really like to hear the conversation between the communications people and public servants, who have to ask why they said such things during the election campaign, because now they are forced to follow through on them. There are a lot of broken promises.

As the critic for cultural industries, I can tell you that the government is doing nothing. It is fine for the minister to be ambitious and hold big consultations, but it is very clear that there is no movement on the other side. She can say whatever she wants, but right now we do not have the crucial measures needed to protect our entrepreneurs in the cultural industries and in other areas threatened by what is being offered online. Although we cannot be against progress, we nevertheless have to recognize that entrepreneurs have a challenge. However, absolutely nothing is happening. It is really pathetic.

This government comes into power with its blue blood complex and thinks it is the natural governing party and that it is royalty. It may seem that members of this government are blue bloods because they are friends with the Bay Street kings, who have their own agenda. No matter what the little candidate said during the election campaign, they are going to tell him that this is not how things go.

It is sad because regular people expect solid social measures in health or social housing. Regular people who watch television are steadily turning to Netflix. In other words, fewer and fewer people are purchasing ads on network television and in our newspapers. In other words, we have smaller budgets for our productions and our own culture, of which we are so proud. The money is drying up. Our media are suffering and we all know it.

Everyone has a weekly paper that is losing ground because it is no longer able to sell ad space, since everyone is sending our advertisement dollars over the Internet. That money is going to California, Mountain View for Google and Palo Alto for Apple.

These are urgent matters, but there is far too much concern over whether the Crown looks good. It is pathetic. It is crazy because it is runs completely counter to what was presented during the election campaign. They presented themselves as a government of and for the

people and the middle class. I am here to tell you that their agenda does not reflect that.

It is quite clear that this government is more interested in listening to its cronies. We have a government that is fuelling cynicism, when it promised there would be none.

When I was here from 2011 to 2015, when the Conservative government was not interested in a word anyone had to say, we knew what we were dealing with. It said it was going to follow its agenda and if we did not like it, then too bad.

However, the Liberals set certain expectations. They say that things could be better, but they are getting worse because issues that are being pushed aside are far more important than what we are seeing here right now.

What a sad situation we are in this week. We are extremely far from the issues that matter to Canadians and Quebeckers.

● (1320)

Those who work short-term, temporary jobs just want to make ends meet. Ultimately, they would like to be able to do more than that. They would like to have ambitions for their children and themselves. They would like to be able to envision a happy retirement. They would like their children to have a better standard of living than they did, and they would like progress to continue. That is not what is happening.

Instead, we now have a government that refuses to listen and is putting on blinders so that it does not have to deal with any issues it does not consider to be a priority. For example, it would be a good idea to ensure that online merchants do not cannibalize the sales of local retailers and entrepreneurs, whether they have an online presence or not. I sometimes get the impression that this government firmly believes that it does not have to listen to us. That is why I was talking about the government's superiority complex, and that is why the entire opposition is united in saying that this does not make sense. We represent the Quebeckers and Canadians who elected us, whether the government likes it or not or believes it or not. There is an alternative to this government. Oh yes, your royal highnesses, there is.

The electors have placed their trust in us, whether we be New Democrats, Bloc members, Greens or Conservatives. It is our duty to speak not only on behalf of our party, but above all on behalf of the citizens who elected us, and even those who did not.

I heard someone mention the magic number of 100,000 constituents. That is a lot of pressure! We have our work cut out for us, as we must represent them all. That is why we are joining together to tell the government that its way of moving its agenda forward is unacceptable. It is elegant in its way of forcing its agenda on us, and its communications are very skilfully put together.

I met with some friends, and there was a seven-year-old girl who asked me what I did for a living. I told her I was a politician. She asked me what a politician was. I told her that my job was to represent the people who chose us in an election, so we could represent their values, their needs and their aspirations. She asked me if it was enjoyable. I told her that usually it was enjoyable, but that for a while now it had started becoming not so much fun. She asked me why. I told her that we were used to expressing ourselves in a parliament that truly respected democracy, but that at the moment, we had the feeling that we had fallen under the influence of certain, let us say, unsavoury countries. She told me that she liked the prime minister a lot. I will not tell him she said so, naturally. She said she thought he was handsome. I told her that was great, that he is very handsome, very nice, which is what we were sold during the election campaign. Behind all that, however, you might say there are some older gentlemen who are not so nice, people who have some very specific priorities and are responsible for this government saying one thing and doing the opposite.

The government talks about its election promises; it is always harping on about them. It says it is doing what it promised in its platform. Come on! The government never once mentioned this sort of change. If we have succeeded today in getting this government to listen to reason a little, it is because we, in the opposition, stood firm. We are still a long way from all the promises it made. Funnily enough, what comes to mind is Bill C-51. What is the government going to do with that?

I am looking at my colleagues who were with me in the last parliament, who were ranting and raving, saying that the bill was scary, that they were going to vote in favour of it but then amend it later on. The Liberals have been in power for a year and a half. Let them get on with it, then, let them do something. One might say the government is suffering from acute “consult-itis”: it consults and then consults again on the consultation.

We need to get going. There are important subjects to address. I understand that most of them are deserving of wise reflection, but what is certain is that we need action. When we look at the situation of the portfolio I am responsible for, culture and the news media, it is a wholesale massacre. The government must hurry up and do something, and must take advice from the people who are there to express the views of their fellow citizens.

● (1325)

[English]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, referring to new members being surprised, I actually am surprised. I am surprised by the antics of the other side of the House over this issue.

Let us just summarize what is happening here. We are all in agreement that unfettered access for members of Parliament is critical. It is first and foremost. We have speaking about this for seven days. What we are speaking about is having this move to PROC. I believe everybody in the House agrees on that. There is not more time to talk about this. We are on day seven of that. We are all in agreement that PROC is the place to study this. That is what we want to have happen.

Privilege

It is not the first time this has happened. Over the past few years, this has happened on a number of occasions. PROC is the place where we can have the in-depth study take place. We can call witnesses. In the past, witnesses have been called in from various departments: the RCMP, the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Clerk. That is the place to have this discussion.

In the interests of time, why will the member not agree that now is the time to send this to PROC so we can do what we need to do?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note my colleague opposite's very high regard for the work that must be done in committee. That is indeed the place where all members who take this role seriously can contribute to the debate. However, why do they not stop basically wasting this Parliament's time with their grand proposals, their bullying, which as we know will inevitably provoke protest from the other side? Why are they doing this? Because they want to buy time to try and fulfill the grand, wild promises they made, when they had no chance of being elected at the time. Finally, they are running this government and wondering how they will go about keeping all those promises. Well, they can take their time.

● (1330)

[English]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in light of the history of the government trying to change the Standing Orders, removing opposition days, invoking closure, shutting down debate, and what happened today at PROC, I am wondering if the member has any confidence that these issues will be dealt with appropriately at PROC.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked an excellent question. I must say that, to this point, from my experience in committee, we have always been able to have respected representatives, delegates of our populations and MPs, given the limitations of the number of members elected, of course. Obviously, if part of a minority, one has less weight than as part of a majority. Can we hope that, in committee, individuals on the government side will conduct themselves in a manner that is responsible, dignified and, honest? That is generally the case, and fortunately committees can decide not to follow the official party line. Naturally, I have to retain confidence in this process, since when we are in committee we can also look each other in the eye and talk.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is notable again the abuses we are seeing in democracy by the government. There is a last minute change to the opposition day now, and we can all guess what the real architect of that change was in terms of discussions the government wanted to have and did not want to have.

Privilege

I would like the member to reflect on the broader trend we see from the government. There was Motion No. 6. Initially the government said all it wanted to do at PROC was have a conversation about changes to the Standing Orders. Then on Sunday the Liberals admitted that they were not just trying to have a conversation, that they were prepared to bring forward a motion in the House without study at PROC to unilaterally push through those changes. No one in the opposition said we should not have a study at PROC. We just said it should not happen in a way that allows unilateral change, yet the chair unilaterally ended the meeting today while opposition members were raising objections to that.

What does the member think about the broad direction of the government? Is this real change that people expected, or is this simply a change in the other direction, the denial of any kind of respect for our democratic institutions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Sincerely, coming from him, I find this absolutely fascinating, because if there is a member who aptly represents a fresh wind and new influences entering a party, it is surely him.

My colleague opposite was talking about wasted time. We can say that the former Conservative government knew what it wanted. It went off in a very specific direction, driving along like a tank, with determination. It was not afraid of the authoritarian image it presented. Of course I always stood against what it presented us, but at least we knew the type of government we were dealing with. Now the issue of wasted time is coming from the other side. We are being told that they are listening. We are being told that all is fine. There is a measure of time wasting inherent in all that. This is obviously a deplorable situation, and, as I see it, a cause of great disappointment, particularly among young people interested in politics, who just see it as more of the same.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week in the second week of our time in the riding, I had the honour of meeting and having meaningful discussions with two groups of youth. One group was the Campbell River Youth Action Committee and the other was the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society youth. When I speak with youth, I hear again and again very intelligent questions, thoughtful discussion, and such a respectful manner. It is an honour to spend time with them and see the great energy many youth are bringing forward in our country.

In those situations, I am often questioned about this place and about the way we work here for the betterment of all Canadians. I hear questions about government and how it works with opposition and the importance of the roles in this place. Many young people seem to understand fundamentally the value of having diversity at the table, differing opinions, and thoughtful discussion. We discuss how MPs hear from constituents and how MPs voice those important realities of communities across Canada. This time we also talked about parliamentary privilege. The youth were interested in what was happening in this House and interested in what they were seeing in PROC. I had this discussion in my riding, and today I am rising to speak to this important question of privilege and, most important, the ability of each member of Parliament in this House to represent his or her constituents.

On March 22, 2017, budget day, members of this House were denied access to Parliament because the Prime Minister's empty motorcade blocked the way. The Constitution of Canada ensures that members of Parliament elected by the members of their constituency have unfettered access to this House. This is to ensure that we can do our jobs and be accountable to the people we represent. On this particular day, that was denied to two members in this place. I am honoured today to stand up and speak to why the right to access this place is so fundamental as a member of Parliament. I also want to talk about the important part of how this could have been resolved quicker, but right now we are seeing the government create an atmosphere of bad faith and having a strong bullying attitude that has led us to where we are right now. Finally, I want to address the issues of parliamentary reform and the so-called discussion the government seems to be focusing on.

When I was elected, I received my member of Parliament identification card. I read on the back that it was my parliamentary privilege to be in this place. In fact, it says, "Under the law of parliamentary privilege, the bearer has free and open access at all times, without obstruction or interference to the precincts of the House of Parliament to which the bearer is a member." I am sure I stand with other members of Parliament in this House in saying that there is a moment almost every day in this place when I take a breath and remember what an honour it is to be here, that thousands of people in my riding of North Island—Powell River expect me to do my work here representing them, and that when I stand up to vote, I am standing with them in mind. This was denied to two members of this House who could not vote. They could not stand up for the thousands of people who rely on them to do so.

I am pleased that all members of this House are taking this issue seriously, but instead of letting the question of privilege run its course, the Liberals pursued a hostile procedure to reverse the Speaker's ruling which supported the fact that privilege was indeed breached. In doing so, the Liberals invited a procedural fight to go on with a second question of privilege coming from the opposition. They cannot on the one hand claim to work with others to reform this institution while immediately using its instruments to enforce their majority. On April 6, the Liberal government shut down debate on the question of privilege when the matter was superseded by the adoption of a motion to proceed to the orders of the day. In the long history of Parliament, this is unprecedented. It is a basic and fundamental right for all of us to sit in this House representing our constituents. On April 6, the government attempted to change this. This was from a party that campaigned on being more open, transparent, accessible, and accountable to Canadians. This is a promise that is not being delivered on.

Privilege

•(1335)

I am a reasonable person, as I heard another member say earlier today, and I believe that this House is full of many reasonable people. When I think of having a meaningful discussion on the discussion paper I know that people in this place are willing to have this discussion, but we have to look at the reality. For the past few weeks the Liberals have claimed that all they want is a discussion about changing how our Parliament works. We agree that changes could be made. It is important to understand something that stands at the core of this meaningful conversation on this discussion paper: power and fairness.

The opposition has been clear from the very beginning. In this place when there are discussions about how we do things here, there is a commitment to consensus. This is the history of this place. It is a deep honour of the fact that the government changes and that the function of the House must allow for voices to be heard.

Red flags have now been quickly raised. The proposed changes needed to be enacted so quickly the procedure and House affairs committee could barely keep up with other ministerial requests. The discussion, as the Liberal House leader likes to refer to it, never happened. The government attempted to ram it through the committee and that failed. Now, the government has announced that it will unilaterally force through changes.

I am heartbroken about this reality. The people of my riding sent me here to speak for them and I want to do that important work. Right now I have situations where people are coming into my office on a daily basis because they cannot find a home to live in. I have people coming in because they are trying to make their small business work and they are facing challenges. This is what the people of our ridings are experiencing. At the core of the work we do here it is always about the process of how we do it. I want to work on those key issues, but if we have a dysfunctional process, we will never get that work done in a meaningful way. How can we honestly talk about reforming this place when the Liberals procedurally torpedo our first motion on privilege and disregard unanimous decision-making?

Our unified opposition with the Conservatives was never about the proposed changes. They were about the process. Changes to the inner workings of Parliament have a long history of parties putting aside their differences and finding consensus. It is not unreasonable for opposition parties to call it for what it is: a Liberal power grab. They would have never agreed to this if they were in opposition.

These are not changes meant to make Parliament better. They are meant to make Parliament better for Liberals and make life easier for the Prime Minister. As Canadians are the ones who will pay the price with a government that is less accountable, we need to stand up in the House and speak out.

Why is the government so hard pressed to pass a reform of some kind? I confess that I wonder if it is simply a cover for the failed electoral reform promise.

How can Parliament be modernized if we do not carry the wisdom of those who have gone before us? In my life, many elders have told me to not throw away the knowledge of the past for the ideas of the future. They are all of value.

The matter of parliamentary privilege is key to our Canadian democracy. I am very disappointed that this is where we are today, that this debate has been stopped by the government.

I hope that the Liberals are listening to their colleagues on this important issue and that we will soon see some respect return to the House.

I would love to have a meaningful discussion about modernization, but it needs to be fair and the power needs to be balanced. I wonder if the government House leader knows that, like me, many members in the House live so far away from this place that the only flight that gets us home is the one that leaves first thing in the morning. If we shorten the workweek and have more sitting weeks, it will mean a lot less time for me in my constituency, a time that I honour profoundly to spend with my constituents, to hear what is happening, to have those meaningful conversations.

I hope that the goodness of the people in this place will come forward, that we will see some positive action moving forward, and that we will understand the wisdom of consensus when we talk about these key issues.

•(1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has consistently said we want to have this discussion on the issue of how we can change our Standing Orders.

The member just described how Fridays impact her. Let me share with her how Fridays would impact me. If we worked a few extra hours on a Thursday and a Tuesday, I can then fly out Friday morning and be in my riding for 9:30 or 10 o'clock in the morning. That gives me an entire day. That might allow me to attend a graduation service. It might allow me to meet with more of my constituents and do more work within my constituency.

All the government House leader has been trying to do is to get people around the table, and in particular at PROC, to start talking about it and to have some dialogue, but there is this resistance that comes out. Members are saying, "Unless you do this, we're not even going to enter the discussion group."

We are not even talking about those issues today. We are talking about the privilege issue, and we agree. The Government of Canada and every member of the Liberal caucus wants it to go to committee. We would like to see it voted on today. The opposition members say they want it to go to committee, but their actions do not reflect their will. If their will is to have it go to committee, all we have to do is allow a vote. We support it. I suspect every member in the House is going to support it.

Privilege

At times maybe the opposition has alternative motives, and if they do, I would suggest they put them to the side and let us first deal with this issue by sending it to PROC where it belongs, where the issue of unfettered access can be dealt with and all members will be assured they will have unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. That is what the Liberal Party wants.

• (1345)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his passionate comments. I do not know if I heard a specific question in there.

I appreciate the meaningful discussion that could potentially happen and that I would like to see happen about the impacts of changing some of our procedures in this place and what that would mean for people who live in different parts of the country and serve different constituencies.

It was interesting to hear what his experience was. For me, it takes nine and a half to 10 and a half hours to get back to my community. It is certainly a long journey. I am very thankful to all the constituents who consistently compliment me on doing that work. It is an honour for me to do that.

I want to say something that is so important: it is that when we have a discussion, if we have it in such a way that there is a balance of power and we honour everyone, good things can come from that. Right now we are being asked to have conversations with a majority committee, not in the good faith and according to the good practices of people before us who made sure that when we were talking about these issues, we had consensus.

I look forward to the government looking at understanding what a consensus model is and making sure that when we have discussions, we do not say “We’re just trying to have a discussion—and oh, by the way, we have all the power, so however the discussion ends, we will be the people who make the decision.” When someone has all the power, they had better make sure they have a process that makes sense for everyone.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the member for North Island—Powell River. She is someone we can really admire for the way she represents her constituents. She has held 28 town halls. Like me, she lives in a rural riding, and it is very difficult to do that in a rural riding, never mind being in one of the most distant ridings in Canada. As she said, it takes her 10 hours to get home, and then she gets on the road.

The government has floated ideas of having us sit more weeks and sit longer. It is really difficult when one lives in a rural riding. I know this because to get to some communities, it takes me 18 hours to get from Ottawa to Vancouver Island, drive across Vancouver Island, and take a boat north for two hours to get to a community like Hesquiah.

I have 10 nations in my riding. She has more. These are small communities, and if we do not get out and meet with these communities, we do not build trust. We do not get to know their issues. We rely on getting to those communities in those weeks when we are in the ridings because we live so far away and it is hard to get

there, and if we extend the sitting weeks, it is going to make it more difficult.

Perhaps the member could talk about the importance of making sure that we have time to get to those people in those communities and the importance of Friday questions so that we can ask questions on behalf of those small communities. We would not have that opportunity if the government takes away Friday sittings. We would not be able to ask questions. We are going to get shut down and they are going to get shut down, and their voice is going to be lost.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour for me to do town halls, one of the things that I think is important for those of us who represent rural ridings. In my case, I have to do at least four town halls just to sort of touch the corners of my riding. It leads to a lot of travel time while I am in the riding. It is very important that we make sure we have a conversation that is meaningful about this type of reform and change, but it needs to be one that has a balance of power so that we can move forward. It is important that we talk to those small communities, because we have to represent them. We have to build the trust. We have to ask questions in this House. Sometimes Fridays are the most powerful days to ask questions for our constituents. It would be a sad loss for all of us.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to congratulate the member who just spoke. It is important for us, as MPs, to be able to represent our constituents properly. If we are given less time in our ridings to represent them well, we will not be as well equipped upon returning to Parliament to convey their views and ensure that their thoughts are expressed here in the House of Commons. Access to the House of Commons is very important. I really feel for my colleagues who have to spend 18 hours on the road or aboard a boat to meet with their constituents. That cannot be easy.

We are here to discuss the following question of privilege:

That the question of privilege regarding the free movement of Members of Parliament within the Parliamentary Precinct raised on Wednesday, March 22, 2017 be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We also have an amendment and a subamendment. What is at issue, here? Free access to the House of Commons. I think this is an issue that should matter a great deal to all of us. I strongly believe that the reason this many people wanted to spend this much time expressing their need to speak to this question of privilege is that it affects most of us. This is an issue of vital importance.

Members must be able to do their work. We all know that nobody can prevent a member from coming to the House to speak, and more importantly, to vote on matters on the orders of the day.

Canadians elected us to represent them here. We are their representatives. We are their voice on very important issues.

I was trying to imagine what might have happened if I had been prevented from coming here to the House to vote on the important issue of medical assistance in dying, after having held consultations, after having met with organizations, or after having spoken to people who were awaiting this legislation for humanitarian reasons. What would have happened? How would those people have interpreted the fact of my being prevented from coming here, from being their voice and voting in the House to convey their views and ensure that their voice is heard and recorded in the history of our country?

The same is true for another issue of concern to us presently, namely the legalization of marijuana. Despite the government's good intentions, despite the fact that all sorts of things are being claimed for the legalization of marijuana, notably that profits will be diverted from organized crime and this drug will be taken out of the reach of young people, the people in my riding think the opposite, and we are going to have to vote on this important issue very shortly.

Last week I was at a high school in my riding. I asked some senior high-school students whether they agreed with the legalization of marijuana or not. A third of them agreed with the government's position, and two-thirds were opposed. However, that is not what we are hearing. According to what we are hearing in the wonderful Care Bear world, everyone is in favour of the legalization of marijuana. Well, that is not true.

I am going to have to bring what these young people are saying here to the House very shortly. What will happen if, for whatever reason, I am prevented from doing so? It will make those young people even more disappointed. It will make them even more disappointed in their MP, in the way the House of Commons works, and in politics in general. That is why it is important to maintain access to the House. I too was eager to speak on this important question of privilege.

We are the representatives of our people.

• (1355)

We are the representatives of our people. Unfortunately, I must say that we are currently facing rather difficult situations. Indeed, as a result of the proposals made by the government on changing the rules and procedures, the habits of Parliament have been somewhat disrupted. There are certain things in Parliament that are not working properly at this time, because a discussion paper with a guillotine has been tabled. Basically, we are being asked to discuss it, knowing full well that once the discussions are over, the guillotine will fall on all the fine words that have been spoken. Unfortunately, this is how the government wishes to use its majority power in the House to get certain changes passed.

I was talking about access to the House, which is guaranteed by a tradition dozens of years old. It is normal for members to have access to the House in order to vote. It is the same for changing the rules. To change the rules unilaterally without consensus is to prevent all the members from fully playing their role.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Gatineau on a point of order.

Points of Order

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR OUTREMONT

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning, during a debate here in the House, I drew the Chair's attention to the comments the leader of the New Democratic Party made to my colleague, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, you indicated that we would review the record and review this incident. The record is now in. I do have the blues and I just want to read into the record some of the comments of the leader of the New Democratic Party toward the government House leader, as disturbing as that might be.

He called her a buffoon and then went on to say, "Where is the organ grinder? You are not the monkey."

These comments are demeaning, belittling, and unparliamentary. Now I understand that the minister and the leader have spoken, but I wanted to state that as the comments were made in this place, I want to give the member the opportunity to apologize for them publicly.

I also know that the tone has not been great perhaps since we came back, and we all have a bit of responsibility to take for that. We certainly have not been perfect, and I do not think that anyone can claim perfection, but these types of comments do not help the tone and the atmosphere in this place. I wanted to table for you and for hon. members the fact that these comments were made and give the hon. leader of the New Democratic Party the opportunity to explain himself and perhaps apologize publicly.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Gatineau for his point of order. I will look into the matter and we can come back to it at a later date in the House.

[*English*]

Is the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan rising on the same point of order?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to comment that it is frustrating when a member is in the middle of giving a speech on a different topic and then a member raises a comment about a previous point of order, as important as that issue may be. There are other times, right after question period, when the member could raise it, but it is profoundly disrespectful, speaking of respect, to the member who is mid-sentence on a completely different topic for that member to stand up because he just has to comment on something that was addressed previously during the day.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his further intervention on the matter. What he is saying is in fact a custom and convention. Nevertheless, the Standing Orders do permit members to rise on points of order, particularly as in this case, as the member for Gatineau has cited, at the earliest occasion that members can do so. Members are encouraged to do that, but I take the member's point. I think that certainly has been the convention typically, but sometimes timeliness in these matters becomes important as well.

Statements by Members

At this point we are very close to the time for statements by members.

• (1400)

[Translation]

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable will have 12 minutes to finish his speech when the House resumes debate on this motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NUTRITION NORTH PROGRAM

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): *Qujannamiik uqaqti.* Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is committed to improve the broken nutrition north program. Although the program is meant to provide northerners with improved access to food, Nunavut continues to have the highest rates of food insecurity in the country. Nearly 70% of homes in Nunavut are food insecure. This statistic is alarming when we consider Canada's status as a first world country.

In 2016, INAC held consultations to gain insight on how to improve the program. The result of this consultation was a "What We Heard" report, released last Friday.

I have always been a strong advocate for improvements to be made to the nutrition north program. As current MP and previous territorial MLA, I know this report echoes and officially documents what we have been saying for many years.

Given the dire food insecurity reality we face in Nunavut, the need for action on this program is now.

* * *

BOSTON MARATHON

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, summer is just around the corner, and with the nicer weather more and more Canadians will be lacing up their running shoes and hitting the sidewalks and trails for their runs, many of them training for and participating in marathons across the country.

This year, I was impressed to learn that at least nine of my constituents participated in the very prestigious Boston Marathon last month. One of these participants was 69-year-old Chris Anderson, who just ran his 113th marathon. Not only that, but this was Chris' 29th consecutive Boston Marathon. He even once ran the Boston Marathon with a broken foot and a modified cast, just to maintain his consecutive streak. I want to commend Chris for his dedication, hard work, and training as he continues to run those marathons.

To qualify and run Boston is quite an achievement, so I would like to congratulate Chris and all the other Boston marathoners from my riding and across the country on their athletic success.

[Translation]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is the sixth anniversary of the tragic death of Cassandra, who was struck by a drunk driver on May 3, 2011, when she was 22 years old.

Unfortunately, Markita Kaulius, Cassandra's mother, will be victimized again by the Liberals who, for purely partisan reasons, want to cut off debate on Bill C-226, an important bill that seeks to fight the scourge of impaired driving by dealing with repeat offenders.

[English]

I hereby ask all MPs present here today to first think of victims of impaired driving and their families and to vote tomorrow to support Bill C-226 to proceed to committee for further review so we can save lives.

[Translation]

Let us put partisanship aside for a moment. Let us put victims first and vote for Bill C-226.

* * *

FLOODING IN VAUDREUIL-SOULANGES

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the mayor of Rigaud, Hans Gruenwald Jr., and the city council declared a state of emergency in the region because heavy rains and melting snow have caused serious flooding along the Ottawa River.

This morning, Rigaud City officials once again asked residents to evacuate because of recent rainfall and a forecast calling for more rain this week.

At this difficult time, I would like to recognize the work being done by the City of Rigaud, by Éric Martel, Rigaud's fire chief, and by the police officers, firefighters, and volunteers who have been working and are working hard to keep everyone affected safe.

On behalf of my family, the House, and the entire community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges, I want to thank them for their dedication to helping those who need it most.

* * *

[English]

TRAIN DERAILMENT IN WOSS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise in the House today.

On April 20, just days before the National Day of Mourning, our riding had a sudden and devastating reminder of the dangers in the workplace, when a train derailment killed three people and injured two more. I send my deepest and sincerest condolences to the families, friends, and workers who experienced this tragedy.

For the people of Woss, I cannot fully express my sense of heartbreak.

Statements by Members

I want to acknowledge the emergency response efforts from the residents of Woss and the neighbouring communities, the RCMP Victim Services, BC Emergency Health Services, North Island Critical Incident Response Network, North Island Crisis and Counselling Centre Society teams, doctors, nurses, health professionals, and site leaders.

I am thankful for the kindness of the community in providing food for the workers and families and the immediate community meeting where people came together to share their shock and grief. In times of sadness, I am grateful to belong to a riding that stands together in these painful times. All my thoughts go to Woss.

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● (1405)

CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as both an MP and a physician to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Canadian Medical Association.

In 1867, only three months after the birth of Canada, the CMA was formed, with just 164 physicians. Today the association represents more than 85,000 physicians and is a strong national advocate for patient health and for a system of health care that is based on evidence, measurable outcomes, and accountability.

Yesterday was Doctors Day in Ontario and Nova Scotia, and it is time to proclaim, on this 150th anniversary, a national physicians day. I hope all members in the House will support a motion to that effect, which I will bring forward.

Canada's physicians and the CMA have served patients well for a century and a half. I would like all members to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

* * *

WORLD OVARIAN CANCER DAY

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, May 8 will mark World Ovarian Cancer Day.

Each year, 2,800 Canadian women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Without a screening test, ovarian cancer is usually detected at the advanced stage after the cancer has spread. It can be devastating. While most ovarian cancer patients initially respond well to treatment, relapse is common, and there are few effective treatment options when the cancer returns.

Research teams across Canada have been at the forefront of designing new treatment strategies. With proper investment, more options will enter the pipeline, leading to more effective treatments for women. It is important that approved treatments be publicly funded and available. Lives depend on it.

On behalf of the many affected Canadian women, their families and their friends, I ask all members of Parliament to join me in helping Ovarian Cancer Canada raise awareness of this worthy cause.

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the spirit of Canada's 150th anniversary to acknowledge our collective desire as Canadians to provide a better life for our families, our communities, and for future generations.

One specific individual, Bajrangi Dass Chadha, is a shining example of this effort. Having left his home in Lahore during the partition, he came from Punjab to Canada in 1978, where he sought a better life for his family and worked as a bridge operator at Canoe Pass. His six children, 19 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren have adopted their Pita-ji's work ethic, optimism, and desire to contribute, something I have witnessed first-hand, after returning to the border of India and Pakistan to propose to his granddaughter Ravi.

Pita-ji's youngest daughter Sunita and her husband Ram Bansal are in the parliamentary precinct today, and while it is not quite 150 years, I would invite everyone in the House to join me in celebrating our beloved Pita-ji on this the occasion of his 101st birthday.

I wish Pita-ji a happy birthday.

* * *

[*Translation*]**MARIE FRAGASSO**

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read something that was written by 23 elementary school students in my riding.

In this world there are exceptional people who do not get the recognition they deserve, and Marie Fragasso, a grade 6 teacher at the Albert Schweitzer elementary school in St-Bruno, is one of them.

Ms. Fragasso has done a lot of charity and volunteer work, even while raising five children of her own and going back to university to get her teaching degree. She has been a scout leader for children, including her own, for 15 years, and she took attendance at children's figure skating for five years.

Much to the delight of grade 5 and 6 students, she has been holding lunchtime "Reach for the Top" sessions twice a week for years. She has also helped with the student government for 14 years.

Any time someone asks her to get involved in something, she does. She has been participating in La Marche Minta for 27 years and has helped out with the holiday fundraising drive for 30. She motivates her students to come to school every day. That is why we love her.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]**OIL SANDS**

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize Cody Battershill, a dedicated supporter of Alberta's job-creating oil sands and founder of Canada Action, which runs grassroots campaigns in support of Canada's energy and resource sectors. Members might recognize this organization by the ubiquitous I, heart, oil sands shirts, stickers and buttons.

Statements by Members

Many years ago Cody walked by a cosmetic store in Calgary that was encouraging consumers to boycott the oil sands. After researching the protest, Cody quickly found out it was funded by international special interests and extremist environmentalist groups and filled with false and misleading information about the impact of Alberta's industries.

Cody has spent over \$100,000 of his own money to fight misinformation on Alberta's oil sands and to educate people about the importance of our natural resource industry.

Unlike the Prime Minister, who wants to phase out the oil sands, I stand with Cody and say I love oil sands.

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GWICH'IN COMPREHENSIVE LAND CLAIM AGREEMENT

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 21, I had the pleasure of attending the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement in Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories.

Land claims strengthen local participation in decision-making, and create certainty about ownership, use, and management of land and resources. There are more than 10 land resources and self-government agreements being negotiated right now in my riding. We have a real chance of finalizing some of these agreements.

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs for her commitment in finding new solutions to long-standing negotiations.

Once again, I congratulate the Gwich'in, and also the Salt River First Nation, which will be celebrating its 15th anniversary of its treaty and land entitlement claim this June. It is my most ardent wish that I will stand again in the House very soon to congratulate more NWT indigenous governments on their newly finalized land claims and self-government agreements.

* * *

DAVID FRANKLIN

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life of an important member from my riding.

I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of David Franklin, the president of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 385, in Aurora.

Mr. Franklin was a remarkable leader in our community and served with pride. David was a long-serving member of the RCMP, a Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal recipient, president of the Aurora Legion, and, more important, a husband, a father, a grandfather, a solid member of our Aurora community, and a wonderful, kind person.

It is impossible to adequately describe the loss to our community of this individual. Suffice it to say, we thank David Franklin and Godspeed.

CANADA'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday, I have decided to shine a light on the unique aspects of my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. My goal is to highlight 50 places, 50 people, 50 events.

To date, I have had the pleasure of visiting the Birken Forest Buddhist Monastery; the ice caves of Bridge Lake, which are known to the first nations as the entrance to the bear world; and participated in the local cowboy festival.

We have roasted blends of Canada 150 coffee, cheered on our local quilters as they completed the Canada 150 creation, and witnessed, for the first time since the 1920s, the Kamloops cenotaph clock working again, when it was started during the Vimy Day commemoration ceremony.

This summer is gearing up to be one of the most memorable, from paddling the Thompson River to celebrating the 150th annual Clinton Ball.

I look forward to showing Canada the distinctiveness of our area, and encourage everyone to join me in commemorating Canada's sesquicentennial.

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ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Geng Tan (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the month of May is Asian Heritage Month. It is a time to celebrate the many contributions of Canadians of Asian heritage to the growth and prosperity of Canada.

As the member of Parliament for Don Valley North, I invite Canadians of all backgrounds to learn more this month about the many ways Canadians of Asian origin have enriched our country. Their struggles and achievements helped transform Canada into the culturally diverse, compassionate, and prosperous nation we know today.

Asian Heritage Month is an excellent opportunity for all Canadians to take part in the many events happening this month in celebration of various Asian cultures. Please join in this celebration.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, thousands of forestry workers marched in Dolbeau-Mistassini to send a clear message. The forestry industry is central to our communities and we must defend it at all costs.

I was able to participate in this march, a symbol of the resilience and determination of our people in the face of the repeated attacks on our industry by our neighbours south of the border. This industry is part of the DNA of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region and of hundreds of communities across the country.

I want to recognize all those who marched in order to send this strong message. I hope that the government clearly heard it and will respond and assume its responsibility towards our forestry communities.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's softwood lumber industry is shocked by the lack of compassion and support from their Prime Minister and the members of this Liberal government.

The tariffs that will apply to all regions of Canada are going to directly or indirectly affect 210,000 families.

What has the Prime Minister done since March 10, 2016, when he promised a new agreement that would replace the one negotiated by the Harper government and that would be signed in less than 100 days? The Prime Minister answered this question more than 400 days later. Nothing, he has done nothing. Even worse, he did not even broach the subject of softwood lumber with the U.S. President last February.

The Canadian softwood lumber industry no longer trusts the Prime Minister. The industry needs real architects in order to build a real agreement.

To parody the empty and repetitive words of the Minister of International Trade, who tells us that Canada wants a good agreement, not just any agreement, I would say this: Canada's softwood lumber workers want a good minister, not just any minister who is unable to stand up for them and save their jobs.

* * *

[English]

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Asthma Day, and spring allergy season is upon us. For those of us with allergic asthma, this is a tough time of year. For some, it is a minor inconvenience. For others, however, it is a life-threatening disease. More than three million Canadians live with asthma. Every year, asthma attacks result in 70,000 emergency room visits and 250 deaths, and they account for \$2.1 billion in both direct and indirect health care costs.

As the former president and CEO of the Asthma Society of Canada, I am glad to have this opportunity to raise awareness about this disease, to call for further research and clean air to breathe, and to close gaps in our health care system, including for pharmaceuticals. No matter where we live in this country, we should have access to the best possible health care and medications to lead productive and healthy lives.

Working with groups like the Asthma Society of Canada, we can ensure all Canadians living with asthma have the highest quality of life.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence refuses to explain why, on at least two occasions, he misled Canadians about the role that he played in Afghanistan. Simply saying that he has no excuse is not good enough. He has lost the confidence of our men and women in uniform.

If the Prime Minister refuses to see the damage that this is doing, why should Canadians trust this government?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the service of our Minister of National Defence, whether it was as a police officer, as a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, or as our defence minister today.

I am proud of the work we are doing to support our men and women of the armed forces, to fulfill our international commitments, and to contribute in a constructive and productive way to the fight against Daesh or with NATO to promote regional stability. We are always there, and we are always ready to serve Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister refuses to provide any explanation as to why he, on at least two occasions, misled Canadians about the role he played in Afghanistan, fabricating that he was the architect of the largest battle Canadians fought in, but he was not. This is not one of those things where saying sorry is going to be enough. He should be moved out. If the Prime Minister refuses to see the damage that this is doing, why should Canadians have confidence in him?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the service of the Minister of National Defence, whether it was as a police officer, whether it was as a decorated member of the Canadian Armed Forces, or whether it is as our Minister of National Defence. The work that he and this government are doing every day to support the men and women of the Canadian Forces to have a positive impact in the world, whether it is in the fight against Daesh, in promoting regional stability in eastern Europe, or through leading a framework nation in Latvia, this is the work that Canadians know needs to be done, and I am proud of the work that the Minister of National Defence has been doing.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one has questioned the bravery of the Minister of National Defence when he was a soldier, but there are two documented cases of the Minister of National Defence taking credit for the hard work and bravery of others, vastly exaggerating his role in a military operation. This is a serious issue and it has deeply offended those who were actually on the battlefield. He said these things as far back as 2015 when he was campaigning as a Liberal candidate in the last election.

My question for the Prime Minister is this. Did he know, was he aware, about these fabrications before he appointed the Minister of National Defence?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the work the Minister of National Defence has done to serve his community, to serve his country, and continues to do is to the honour of all Canadians. The work we are doing internationally in the fight against Daesh, supporting our allies in NATO, and continuing to be strong leaders around the world, while we give the right tools and opportunities to show the leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces around the world, is something that is truly important to me. We stand by the Minister of National Defence and the great work he is doing.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister keeps telling us that Canadians expect people to apologize when they have made a mistake, but actually, Canadians also expect people to do the right thing when they have done something wrong. The right thing for the minister to do is step aside. On two occasions, he made a political calculation that, by exaggerating his military resumé, somehow this would get him further ahead in politics. That might be something that he did as a Liberal politician, but it is wrong for a minister who represents our men and women in uniform.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and move him away from the defence portfolio?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the exemplary and extraordinary service that has characterized the life of the Minister of National Defence is one that we can all be proud of, as he stands up every day for the men and women of the Canadian Forces, focusing on giving them the tools and the opportunity to serve and lead the way we know they can on the world stage, the way the world needs Canada to show leadership. This is something that we are tremendously proud of as a government, and we continue to look for more opportunities to lead and serve around the world.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I remind hon. colleagues of Standing Order 16(2), which provides that no member shall interrupt when another member has the floor.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister refuses to acknowledge the severity of this and the damage it has done. That, more than anything else, tells us where his priorities are, and they are not with the military. He pulled our fighter jets out of the fight against ISIS when our allies asked us to stay. He cut \$12 billion in funding to the defence department. Now he is refusing to remove a defence minister who has twice misled Canadians about his role in a military mission.

Does the Prime Minister understand that his first step in changing course from the damage that he is doing to the military is to remove the defence minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we took office we actually increased the effectiveness of Canada's role against Daesh by doing what we do best. We were on the ground, training and supporting local troops as they took the fight directly to Daesh. That is something that we as a country have always excelled at. We demonstrated our capacity to do that in Afghanistan. We continue to understand that giving the proper tools

and funding to the Canadian military to be able to accomplish the goals that we set for them here in the House is extremely important.

I am proud of this government's record.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when they were in opposition, the Liberals called for a public inquiry into the shameful Afghan detainee scandal. Why did the Prime Minister tell his defence minister to block just such an inquiry?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke directly with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner on this file. She is satisfied and she has closed this file.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister missed the question.

The defence minister is on record as saying that it was the Prime Minister's Office that decided there would be no inquiry. We are asking the Prime Minister to explain now why there will be no inquiry into the shameful Afghan detainee scandal. He was in favour of it in opposition. Why did he tell his minister to block it now?

[Translation]

That is the question. Why does he want to block an inquiry into the Afghan detainee scandal?

[English]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has repeatedly confirmed that he has no information on the file. As to the issue, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has repeatedly said that she is satisfied and is closing the file.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in fact what the Ethics Commissioner said was that the defence minister told her he played absolutely no role. He gave the Sergeant Schultz "I know nothing" answer. The problem is that he then went on to claim to be an architect, and senior military officials described him as playing a key intelligence role.

Does the Prime Minister actually believe his Minister of National Defence when he says he knows nothing about what went on with the Afghan detainees when we know he played an—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has an exemplary record of service to this country, whether it is as a decorated police officer, as a decorated military officer, or as Minister of National Defence.

The work we are doing to demonstrate our support for the Canadian Forces and giving them the tools and the opportunities they need to demonstrate leadership and bring Canada's positive impact to the world is extremely important to this government and will continue.

*Oral Questions***GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, next, the PBO plays a crucial role in holding a government to account, and that is what the Liberals used to believe when the Conservatives were in power. If the Prime Minister's changes had occurred under the last government, we would not have known about the F-35 costs, for example.

The Prime Minister said that the PBO must be “truly independent”, so the question is, why is he muzzling it?

[*Translation*]

Why is the Prime Minister attacking the parliamentary budget officer?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are giving the parliamentary budget officer more resources and greater independence.

That is exactly what we promised because we knew that, after many long years under the Stephen Harper government, we needed tools to ensure government transparency. That is precisely why we are strengthening the parliamentary budget officer's powers.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, my colleague from Jonquière and I joined thousands of people at a march in Dolbeau-Mistassini, which is in my region, to remind the Government of Canada how important the forestry industry is across the country, including in our region.

When he got back from China, the Minister of International Trade told us it would be good for Canada to sell its wood elsewhere. We have been trying to do that for 20 years. We will keep trying, but that is not something we need to be told.

What is your plan? Never mind what you say; what are you going to do to keep forestry workers employed?

The Speaker: Order. I do not believe the hon. member is asking me about my intentions in this regard even though I, too, am concerned.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working very closely with all our provincial counterparts, including those in the Government of Quebec.

We realize that our main responsibility is do to everything we can to help the producers, workers, and communities affected by these punitive and, in our opinion, inappropriate, tariffs.

We will continue to work with our partners because we believe that, together, we will find the solution that best serves the interests of workers and communities—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a better chance of getting an answer from you.

The minister of defence unduly took credit for the success of an important mission in Afghanistan. He broke the cardinal rule of showing respect for his fellow soldiers. It is a serious disservice to his rank, his role, and especially his fellow soldiers.

I have a simple question: was the Minister of National Defence the architect of Operation Medusa or not?

• (1430)

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would never detract from the accomplishments of our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. Our government will always work hard to make sure that they are truly served.

I am honoured to serve our men and women in uniform. I am going to continue to work hard for them every single day to make sure they have the right tools, the right capabilities, and the right care, so they can carry out their missions.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister has been telling so many fictional stories that he cannot keep his facts straight. For example, in 2015 the minister claimed that General Vance coined the term that he was the architect for his work back in 2006 on Operation Medusa, but that cannot be true because General Vance did not take command in Afghanistan until 2009.

The minister's fabrication was no mistake. This was his personal choice. If the Prime Minister lacks the good judgment to fire the minister, will the defence minister do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would never detract from the great work of our men and women in uniform. Our government is focused on making sure that we provide the right care for our troops. That is why the Prime Minister mandated me to conduct a thorough defence policy review to make sure we do a thorough assessment so that our troops can have all the right tools so they can carry out their missions. That is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not hear much sincerity from the defence minister today and no apology for his remarks and exaggerations.

The military's feelings toward our defence minister have gone from disappointment to outrage. Former air force commander General Bill Carr wrote that our defence minister's image is “at best, one of an insecure veteran in a field he professes to know. For the good of the Canadian Forces, his departure would be a relief. He has no alternative but to step down.”

Does the defence minister have any honour, integrity, or humility left? Will he do the honourable thing and step down?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the former general for his service to this country.

Oral Questions

I will continue to work hard and our government will continue to work hard to make sure our men and women in uniform have the right tools. Every single day we will make sure that they have the right care and the right tools. We have conducted a thorough analysis on our defence policy review and it will do just that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being sorry does not cut it once the confidence of our men and women in uniform is lost.

Soldiers who pad their CVs may be court-martialled and face serious consequences.

Now that the Minister of National Defence is seated at the cabinet table, does he think he deserves to be treated differently than the troops with whom he served his country?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of serving our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces as the Minister of National Defence. Every single day I will work hard, as I have always done, to make sure that they have all the right tools, the right funding, and care for them to carry out their missions. I will do that every single day.

The Speaker: It is entirely appropriate for members to ask tough questions and be aggressive in their questions, but it is not appropriate to interrupt when another member is speaking.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the use of “alternative facts” damaged the reputation of the Minister of National Defence so badly that he has lost all credibility. He has lost the confidence of our troops, he is an embarrassment to veterans, and Canadians no longer believe him. He is a laughing stock and none of our allies will take him seriously.

The Prime Minister lacks judgment because he refuses to dismiss his defence minister. As a veteran, I am asking the Minister of National Defence, who is a veteran, to step down if he has any honour left.

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member opposite has a job to do. As Minister of National Defence, I am making sure we have all the right tools. We work very closely with our coalition partners in making sure, as we have done as government, we are taking a leadership role at NATO, increasing our contribution to the Iraq mission, and making sure our men and women have all the necessary tools to carry out the missions at home and abroad, and we will do just that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier the Prime Minister refused to answer any questions, so I will try my luck directly with the Minister of National Defence.

Why are the Liberals refusing to call a public inquiry into the Afghan detainee scandal?

Why did the Minister of National Defence tell the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner that he knew nothing about this scandal because he was just a reservist?

Would he be so kind as to tell the House specifically what role he played in Afghanistan? It is high time that Canadians knew the truth.

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak with any officer of Parliament. I have spoken to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner on this subject. She is satisfied with that and she considers this matter closed.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a meaningful apology must be followed by changed behaviour, transparency, and accountability, and that is just not what we are getting from the minister.

The defence minister told the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner that he knew nothing about the transfer of Afghan detainees to face torture. However, both he and his supervisor in Afghanistan have said that he played a key role in intelligence liaison with local Afghan forces. Can the Minister of National Defence tell us how he can simultaneously have known nothing about prisoner transfers to local Afghan authorities and at the same time have been Canada's key liaison person with these same forces?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work that our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and our civilians conducted in Afghanistan. As I stated, I am pleased to speak with any officer of Parliament. I have spoken to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. She is satisfied with the answer and she considers the matter closed.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how does the minister explain making what he calls a mistake? Standing in this House and saying he owns a mistake without any explanation as to why he made it is not contrition; it is deflection. No one disputes the minister's service, but why did he feel justified in so blatantly exaggerating his record?

Our troops need a minister who has their back, not someone so eager to pat himself on his. Will the minister stop with the Prime Minister's talking points and explain to Canadians why he fabricated the story?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take every opportunity to make sure that we highlight the great work of our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces, such as by taking trips into Iraq and making sure they have the necessary tools. I recently was in Malaysia where we had two of our ships there highlighting the great work that they do in the Asia-Pacific. I will always highlight the great work of the men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces as I have always done.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, *Ubique Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt*.

“Whither right and glory lead” is the motto of the 6th Field Artillery Regiment, where I had the honour of completing my formal military service. Non-commissioned members like myself follow orders not because we fear officers, but because these orders ensure the protection of the federation and the honour of our homeland.

The Minister of National Defence has breached that trust. Since his moral authority is gone, will he do the right thing and step down?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of serving as the Minister of National Defence. I want to make sure that our government provides all the necessary tools and that is exactly what we are doing with our defence policy review. We are making sure that we have done a thorough analysis and making sure that they have all the right tools and the right funding and, most important, the right care so that they can carry out their missions both at home and abroad.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has a huge credibility problem and every time he stands up, he digs himself deeper into the credibility hole. He is tarnishing the reputation of the Prime Minister. He is tarnishing the reputation of the government abroad. Worse, he is tarnishing the reputation of our military.

Nobody questions this man's honour and what he did when he served this country in the military. We are questioning his judgment and his honour today. Will he do the right thing for our men and women in uniform and step aside?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, I would never want to detract any confidence from our Canadian Armed Forces. Our government is focused on making sure our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces have all the necessary tools to make sure that we are doing a good job, whether it is in domestic operations supporting Canadians, or whether it is in taking the increased leadership role in NATO, or whether it is in increasing the fight against Daesh. We are making sure that they all have the necessary tools. That is exactly what our government is going to do.

● (1440)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he has already distracted from the good work that the men and women in uniform have done and are doing. That is done. He can now try to make it right by giving them their honour back.

If our men and women in uniform try to steal valour and try to take credit for something that they did not do in the military, there is a consequence in terms of discipline, in terms of the trust that they will have lost with their colleagues. Does the Minister of National Defence not understand that he broke this code of conduct, that he broke trust? The only fix is for him to step aside and let our men and women in uniform have a leader who they can actually trust today.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are focused on making sure that we provide all the necessary tools for our Canadian Armed Forces, to make sure that

they have all the necessary tools when we as government send our folks on important missions.

I have the privilege of serving as Minister of National Defence. I am honoured to serve our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. I am honoured to be able to stand as a representative of this government and work through the defence policy to make sure that there are all the necessary tools and the care for the men and women who serve us.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to trade with the Liberals, secrecy appears to be the name of the game. Last week it was revealed that the government secretly walked away from a potential softwood lumber agreement with Obama. Thanks to Japanese news reports last week, we learned that TPP negotiations are back on and are happening today in a secret location in Toronto.

The Liberals in opposition criticized the Conservatives for negotiating major trade deals in secret and promised to do better. The TPP was a bad deal. Will the Liberals come clean with Canadians on why they are now leading the charge for TPP 2.0?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think Toronto is very secret, by the way.

We all know that trade is good for our nation. Trade means growth and growth means jobs. What the member should understand is we want to be front and centre when it comes to engagement about principled, modern, and inclusive trade in the Asia-Pacific. That is why I offered to have the officials come to Toronto. Canadians expect that of us. The Prime Minister expects that of me. That is the smart thing to do for Canadians.

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[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals failed to negotiate a softwood lumber agreement. They also failed to come up with a plan to deal with the crisis, which is now very real. Countervailing duties are already affecting sawmill production. The government needs to understand that these countervailing duties are affecting thousands of jobs and that thousands of families are going to suffer as a result.

How is it possible that the Minister of Natural Resources still has not presented any immediate measures to deal with the crisis? How much longer is he going to drag his feet on the softwood lumber file?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has been working for months, not only with the Government of Canada, but right across the country with all of our provincial counterparts. We know that we need both in the short term and in the long term a plan for the forestry sector. In the short term, it is essential that we look after workers and producers. We will use every instrument available to us, looking at the long term, to make sure there is an expansion of export markets, that we support the transition of the industry. We know how important the forestry sector is for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government was elected on a platform to build sustainable communities from coast to coast to coast. Clean, safe drinking water is one of the most important ways that we can ensure our communities are thriving.

Will the minister tell the House how the government is supporting vital water infrastructure?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month our government joined the Province of Manitoba and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities to announce 24 new water and waste-water projects with a combined investment of \$34 million to upgrade, rehabilitate, and expand water and waste-water facilities. These investments will have a real and tangible impact on communities and families while ensuring they have safe and clean water to drink.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, criticism was swift and consistent in response to the dual appointments of Stéphane Dion as ambassador to both the European Union and Germany. Each is a crucial and critical portfolio to manage. Now the European Union has rejected Stéphane Dion as ambassador.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he would insult two of our strongest and closest allies by suggesting that Canada's relationship with each of them is a part-time job?

● (1445)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Stéphane Dion is a great Canadian public servant, statesman, and, above all, patriot, who did tremendous work to keep our country together. I am confident that Stéphane Dion will do an equally outstanding job representing our country in Europe. I must say I have heard personally from Europeans, including Chancellor Merkel, including Federica Mogherini, how delighted they are to have Stéphane Dion there. For me, it is an honour to work with him.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems as though Liberal promises are hard to keep, even within the party. To thank Stéphane Dion for his years of service, or perhaps it was to push him aside and free up a seat in Montreal, the Prime Minister appointed him ambassador to Germany and ambassador to

the European Union. However, in a dramatic turn of events, the European Union refused to play along with the Prime Minister.

Can the Prime Minister now tell us why the European Union refused his appointment? Why did it insist that he be a special envoy rather than an ambassador?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I already said, Stéphane Dion has always fought for a better country for all Canadians. Mr. Dion understands the transatlantic relationship that we have with our European allies and he will be able to advance our interests and our common values.

It is a privilege for me to work with Mr. Dion, and I know that our European allies, like all Canadians, have the greatest respect for him.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have asked many times for an explanation of the bizarre double ambassadorial appointments of Stéphane Dion after he was shuffled out of cabinet, appointments publicly ridiculed by former Canadian diplomats, as well as more quietly among current foreign affairs professionals, and which did offend the EU.

Today Mr. Dion finally came clean before the foreign affairs committee. His bizarre twofer appointment, he said, was the Prime Minister's decision and the PM's alone.

Will the Prime Minister finally take responsibility for his spectacularly bad decision?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would rather characterize the appointment of Stéphane Dion, an outstanding Canadian, to this essential role as a spectacularly good decision.

Stéphane Dion has fulfilled, over many years, many roles in the service of Canadians with honour, dignity, and intelligence. He will do the same thing in Europe. We should all be proud that he will be there for us.

The Speaker: Canadians expect members not to interrupt. We are going to go on with the hon. member for Victoria.

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PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year the health and justice ministers commissioned the Council of Canadian Academies to conduct independent studies on the eligibility criteria under the new law on medical assistance in dying.

Oral Questions

Dr. Harvey Schipper is a vocal opponent of that law, yet he has now been made chair of a committee under it. This raises serious doubts about the impartiality of the entire process. How can Canadians have any confidence that the working group will examine the issue fairly, when its chair opposes medical assistance in dying?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Council of Canadian Academies uses a totally independent process when naming individuals to this panel.

I found out at the same time as the public found out the names of the individuals. Individuals are named to the panel to debate the evidence before them and not to debate their personal views. While each panellist may approach the topic from a particular standpoint, the entire panel comes together to assess the evidence.

The panel has 43 people on it, who undoubtedly have varying personal views. We expect them to work with diligence and to examine the evidence appropriately.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while Quebec is creating a committee of experts and hopes to broaden eligibility for medical assistance in dying, we have just learned that the minister has accepted the appointment to the position of chair of the working group on advance requests of Dr. Harvey Schipper, who opposes medical assistance in dying and advance requests. Several stakeholders have criticized this appointment, and rightly so.

How can Canadians have confidence in this committee and believe that this working group will truly be objective and impartial when they know that its chair is one of the most strident opponents of medical assistance in dying and advance requests?

• (1450)

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this group was asked to find individuals to do this work.

[*English*]

They have chosen 43 individuals. These are esteemed academics. They were chosen by an independent process by the Council of Canadian Academies. They did so in order to examine these issues, and we expect them to do so with the utmost integrity.

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[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians working in the world of finance and mortgages are worried.

Alternative mortgage lender Home Capital Group saw its shares plummet over the past few days because of an investigation into its operations. This is causing concern in Canada's finance sector, which is losing confidence in the company.

In these types of situations, it is the duty and responsibility of the Minister of Finance to reassure Canadians and set the record straight.

Therefore, could the Minister of Finance tell the House when he found out about this situation, what he knows about how this

financial tragedy started, and what he intends to do to ensure that this situation does not—

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Finance.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to update the House in this situation. We have been very closely monitoring the situation as soon as we understood that there was a challenge with the company in question. We were pleased that there was a market-based solution that was found in order to resolve the situation of the company in question. We believe that our financial system is strong and resilient, and this is evidence that we are able to find market-based solutions to challenges. That is a strength of our economy.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as much as these Liberals claim to be consulting and listening, over at the finance committee, witness after witness, including the Liberals' own witnesses, told us they were not consulted before the Liberals forced their mortgage changes onto Canadians. Had the Liberals bothered to listen to the industry, they would know that the issues facing companies such as Home Capital are very serious.

When will the finance minister start listening to the experts from the Canadian mortgage industry?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I am happy to address this issue. It is true that we are facing some pockets of risk in our housing markets in Vancouver and Toronto. Certainly, it is true that there was a challenge with this particular company. We do not see those two things as linked.

Importantly, what happened in this situation was that there was a flight of depositors from the company in question. We listened, we heard, we stayed very engaged. The market also was engaged. We were pleased to see that there was a market-based solution to dealing with this challenge in our financial markets. That is exactly the way the system should work.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when most people get insurance, they pay a premium. If they have a claim, they pay a deductible. However, CMHC offers banks full insurance against losses. While homebuyers pay the premium and taxpayers pay the deductible, the banks pay neither. Hundreds of billions of dollars are at risk as a result.

Has the government calculated how much taxpayers could lose if a market correction causes home prices to go down, or higher interest rates cause mortgage defaults to go up?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I am very pleased to answer this question. In fact, yes, we have a housing system in this country that works very effectively. We have an insurance system that helps to ensure that people's housing is safe, and it is working. We will continue to remain vigilant around this system to make sure we are considering how risk is best shared between those insurers and the federal government, through the CMHC and to participants in the market.

We have said that we will look at that risk sharing in order to make sure it continues to appropriately deal with market challenges, and that is what we are engaged in doing.

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TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has made it clear that it takes an evidence-based approach in its decision-making. This is important to maximize efficiency and potential across Canada. Our transportation network is no exception. We need to be able to evaluate performance and make targeted investments.

Would the parliamentary secretary inform Canadians on how they intend to make our transportation network even more efficient with the new innovative elements contained within budget 2017?

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

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STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal House leader claims she is having discussions with all MPs about substantive changes to our democracy. What she is actually doing is ramming through a motion to make the Liberals less accountable to Canadians.

The Liberal member for Malpeque thinks there should be all-party consensus. Even the Liberal platform itself says so:

We will look at...ways to make Question Period more relevant...and will work with all parties to recommend and bring about these changes.

Did she actually read their platform, or is she taking communications lessons from the defence minister?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have shared information with regard to the government's approach to respond and to really be able to deliver on the commitments we made to Canadians. In the campaign, we made commitments to modernize the way this place works. In the letter that I provided to opposition House leaders, I actually shared direct quotes from the platform so that they could see where those ideas were coming from. I was actually hoping to have an even larger conversation with new ideas. Unfortunately, there was an unwillingness from the opposition side to have that conversation. I welcome the continuation of sharing ideas and really bringing this place into the 21st century.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this second opportunity.

This government has made it clear that it takes an evidence-based approach in its decision-making process. This is important to maximize efficiency and potential across this great nation of Canada. Our transportation network is no exception, and we need to be able to evaluate performance and make targeted investments.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport inform all Canadians on how the government intends to make our transportation network more efficient, with new innovative ideas and elements contained within budget 2017?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, high-quality accessible data and high-quality analysis are key in order to make smart decisions as a government. I am proud to say that our government has committed \$50 million in budget 2017 to launch a new and innovative trade and transportation information system. This will help us make the targeted investments in transportation corridors that will foster growth and create good, well-paying jobs for Canada's middle class.

* * *

[Translation]

SHIPPING

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, major flooding is having a huge impact on many municipalities in Berthier—Maskinongé and across Quebec, including Yamachiche. I have two questions today.

First, what does the federal government plan to do to help these people and municipalities?

Second, can the Minister of Transport confirm today that the investigation in Yamachiche has begun and can he tell us when that information will be made public?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

We know that many communities in Quebec and across Canada are having a hard time this flood season. My colleague, the Minister of International Trade, talked to me again today about the specific situation in Yamachiche. We recognize the importance of safe and environmentally sound navigation.

When the incident was reported, the Coast Guard, at the behest of Transport Canada, issued a notice to shipping requesting a reduction in speed. We are investigating the situation, and we are going to take the necessary steps to address this problem.

*Points of Order***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2017 budget includes funding to implement energy efficiency and clean energy technologies, to retrofit federal buildings, and to reduce or eliminate emissions from vehicle fleets.

Can the Minister of Natural Resources tell the House how the government is supporting electric vehicles and alternative fuel infrastructure as tools for the transition to low-carbon transportation options?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for his excellent question.

The transportation sector accounts for nearly 25% of greenhouse gas emissions. Our budget continues to support green infrastructure with a \$120-million investment to deploy infrastructure for electric vehicle charging and refuelling stations for alternative fuels, such as natural gas.

* * *

• (1500)

*[English]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals spend a lot of time and effort championing what many have argued to be one of the planet's organizations that spends the most time on anti-Israel motions, and that, of course, is the United Nations. Today, while Israel is celebrating its 69th anniversary of becoming a modern state, the UN passed yet another anti-Israel motion.

Will the Prime Minister today stand up in this House and condemn the United Nations for its continuous attacks on Israel?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a steadfast friend and ally of Israel, as I was honoured to say at the World Jewish Congress in New York last week. I will be delighted to repeat that tomorrow at the Israeli embassy, where I will be the guest of honour at the Independence Day celebration.

I believe the member opposite was speaking about the UNESCO action. I want to be clear that we object to any attempt to unfairly single out Israel for criticism, including in multilateral forums like UNESCO.

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*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly unanimously adopted Martine Ouellet's motion to remind the federal government that supporting agriculture, including Quebec's dairy industry and our family farm system, means maintaining supply management. The National Assembly's motion also calls on the Government of Canada to maintain supply management, which must be non-negotiable should NAFTA be reopened.

Will the government make a solemn promise to maintain supply management as it currently stands before and during negotiations with the Americans?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United States is our neighbour and our most important trading partner. Agricultural trade between Canada and the United States is worth \$47 billion a year, and we are well aware of how important this relationship is to Canadian agriculture. The minister is looking forward to speaking with the new agriculture secretary once he is confirmed about the mutual benefits of our agricultural trade relationship. Our government will continue to protect and defend farmers and supply management.

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the House yesterday, the hon. Minister of Natural Resources said, first of all, that he disagrees with the decision to impose unfair and punitive tariffs on softwood lumber; second, that he has created a federal-provincial task force, and I want to emphasize this, to support the forestry industry; and third, that he supports forestry workers. That is all great.

In that case, why is his government being so inconsistent and refusing what, first of all, Quebec, second, the forestry industry, and third, the forestry workers themselves are asking for in terms of support, that is, loan guarantees?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for accurately portraying our position. We are working with all those across the country who have an interest in this file. Together we are focusing in on the short-term realities of the possibility of layoffs and job losses in Quebec and elsewhere. We are talking about transition in the industry. We are talking about the expansion of export markets. We are taking it seriously, across the country, to do whatever we possibly can to soften the blow of these punitive and unwelcome tariffs.

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*[Translation]***POINTS OF ORDER**

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR OUTREMONT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following a response to a question from a colleague opposite, I learned that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was offended by something I said this morning. I went to meet with her to offer my sincere apologies, and I also want to apologize here right now.

The Speaker: I greatly appreciate the comments made by the hon. member for Outremont.

Privilege

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Over the 11-plus years I have been in this House, I have witnessed all kinds of heckling from all corners of the House, and depending on the subject, some with more volume and some with less. I would hazard to say that if everyone looked in the mirror, members would see that they are guilty on a continuum in some way, shape, or form.

Certainly one of the people who has been the least guilty of that has been the member for Thornhill. In fact, the only thing I can remember is that the member for Thornhill was the victim of one of the most egregious heckles, calling him a piece of waste, from the other side of the chamber. Therefore, I would ask you to maybe reassess that judgment with respect to taking a question from the fine member for Thornhill.

• (1505)

The Speaker: I am actually grateful to the hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook for pointing out the almost always good behaviour of the hon. member for Thornhill, although there was an exception today. Of course, members on all sides, and members around him, need to be mindful of the Standing Orders and the rules and restrain themselves, or else there are consequences, as there were today.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to pick up where I left off before question period, in order to discuss this important question of privilege. I must digress a little first, however.

In their responses today, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence repeated the same talking points, regardless of the question. After hearing the Prime Minister give the same answers in the same way to every question he was asked, I have to wonder why this government wants to give the Prime Minister a full question period to answer the opposition's questions. I think he would be able to give identical answers to everything in three minutes and we would see right away that it would always be the same.

To come back to my speech, we can all agree that as representatives, we are all entitled to the same parliamentary courtesies and privileges regardless of our political affiliation. Whether we are on the government benches, on the opposition, or independent MPs, we all have the right to the same consideration when it comes to accessing the House of Commons.

Preventing a parliamentarian from exercising his or her right to vote, regardless of the reason, is unacceptable. The Liberal government was elected on promises of transparency. It referred to sunny ways. It also promised the following on page 29 of the Liberal platform:

For Parliament to work best, its members must be free to do what they have been elected to do: represent their communities and hold the government to account.

That is exactly what we are doing, and it is exactly what the Liberals are trying to do with the proposed changes to our rules, to our Standing Orders, our bylaws, and how our House operates. In light of what has gone on in the past few weeks, it is clear that this promise from the Liberal platform is unfortunately not one that the Liberals will keep, just like the promise they made to have only a small deficit.

The deficit is currently quite enormous and the books will not be balanced before 2055. It is the Minister of Finance himself, not the opposition, who is saying this. If the opposition had not done its job and raised the issue, we would never have found out because the minister kept this tidbit of information to himself. He made it public a few days before Christmas and most Canadians would not have learned this important information. It is not surprising, coming from a political party that mastered the art of making promises during the election and doing the opposite once elected.

The government says that it is honouring its promise to improve and modernize Parliament. On page 30 of the Liberals' platform, we read: "We will not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny." That really takes the cake, because it is exactly what the Liberals did.

First there was a discussion paper containing a threat regarding the adoption of a report before a certain date. If that is not a trick, I do not know what is. The Liberals realized that it did not work, so they backed down on their discussion paper and took away the committee's right to do its work. Then they brought the matter back to the House, where they have a majority and where they could be sure to have more control over the opposition members. The government had to back down because of a public outcry.

The government now says that it is backing down and that it wants to go ahead with just what it promised during the election campaign. However, as I just clearly and explicitly demonstrated, not only is the government not keeping all of its promises, but it is cherry-picking the ones it wants to keep. That is a trick.

It still wants to make changes without assuring us parliamentarians that it will not impose any changes without the unanimous consent of all parties of the House. This is a power grab. How else can we describe what this government wants to do?

I would like to quote a few articles. I especially liked one that was in *Le Devoir* this morning and was entitled "Liberal Doublespeak". I will not read the whole article, because that would take too long.

• (1510)

However, there are certain passages that warrant our attention. The title of the article is "Liberal Doublespeak". I will read a few passages.

The parliamentary process has its faults, but that is the price we pay to keep tabs on our governments...In trying to escape that scrutiny, the Prime Minister's Liberals are only making things worse and casting some serious doubt on their promise to respect Parliament.

Since March, work in the House of Commons has been slowed by the opposition's stalling tactics, brought about by an argument largely provoked by the government, its parliamentary leader, and their proposals to make changes to the rules of Parliament. Were it just a matter of making changes, there would be no problem, but the government insisted on a tight deadline and stubbornly refused to commit to not act unilaterally in the event of a stalemate...

Privilege

The opposition is furious, and rightly so, because, according to the conventions of the House, consensus must prevail, promise or no promise.

I think that is fairly clear. It is not the opposition that is saying it. Anyone who has seen what has been happening here over the past few weeks knows that the opposition is just doing its job. The opposition is defending the right to speak of Canadians who are represented by the MPs they duly elected. That is what we are doing, and the media is starting to pick up on it. Surprise. Now the Liberals are trying to take a small but strategic step backwards. Unfortunately, as we can see from the editorial in this morning's edition of *Le Devoir*, journalists and Canadians can see right through those tactics.

The article goes on as follows:

This backtracking is welcome, but the Leader of the Government is using it as a pretext to issue a warning.

Did I understand the meaning of the new proposal correctly? The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is giving us a warning.

She wrote, "under the circumstances, the government will need to use time allocation more often in order to implement" its legislative agenda. One would think she was a Conservative minister.

When the Liberals were on this side of the House, they sang a different tune. They promised sunny ways, a new way of doing things, and so, so much respect. Now it looks like they have opted to stick with the tradition of government acting in accordance with rules approved by consensus. That is what we did when we were in power. That is what they should keep doing if they want to restore respect and balance to the House.

The editorial writer went on to say this:

Nothing justifies this threat. After a year and a half in power, the government's legislative agenda is pretty thin. Even so, it has used time allocation to expedite the study of 11 bills. [The Liberals] say they want to consult and talk, but attacking the Conservatives, insisting on taking unilateral action, and threatening closure sends quite a different message to the other parties.

The reason their legislative agenda is being obstructed, as it was last year, is that they are no better now than they were then at resisting the temptation to manoeuvre in a bid to take greater control over Parliament. Their appetite for power not only hinders their ability to keep their promises, it is inconsistent with those promises.

Those excerpts were from an editorial by Manon Cornellier in today's edition of *Le Devoir*.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you seek it, you will find the unanimous consent of the members of the House for me to table this article so that everyone can read it.

• (1515)

The Speaker: The member for Mégantic—L'Érable is asking for unanimous consent of the House to table a document. Does he have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent. Does the member intend to continue? He has the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about openness and transparency. I have been transparent and I know that some of my colleagues who do not speak French would have been able learn about this great editorial had I been able to table the document.

Yesterday, I also had the opportunity to participate in a scrum where the opposition was commenting on the new discussion paper. We should really be calling it a new attempt by the Liberals to grab power and absolute control over the House of Commons. A journalist asked me if I could explain to Madame Brossard from Brossard why I do not agree with the changes proposed by the Liberals. I would say this to Madame Brossard from Brossard: my role is to stand up for her when the government forgets about her. Today, the government wants to muzzle her because it does not want to hear what she has to say when she disagrees with the government. I am standing up for Madame Brossard from Brossard against the arrogance and absolute power of this government.

That is what Madame Brossard from Brossard has to understand. In the heat of the moment at the press conference, I was unable to think of the right words. I was not sure how to respond to Madame Brossard. However, what Madame Brossard needs to know is that the official opposition, the second opposition party, and the independent members of this House all have a role to play in representing their constituents.

When MPs are prevented from playing their role, when they are prevented from coming here to express themselves and share their constituents' thoughts, when they are prevented from voting, it is all the same thing. Those members are being prevented from playing their role properly. It is your duty, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that all of these rules are followed. I am very grateful that you agreed to allow us to discuss this question of privilege. The number of people who have spoken about it shows that this is a very sensitive issue and that you were right in allowing us to discuss it so that you could hear what all of our colleagues had to say. I am convinced that their comments will be very useful to you in the future.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons turned a deaf ear. She never wanted to reassure us despite our repeated requests not to make any changes unilaterally. My colleague the House leader of the official opposition co-signed a letter with her colleague the leader of the second opposition party. They sent that letter to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons more than three weeks ago. We finally received a response this past weekend, or three weeks later. When two people are talking and they ask a question, but the answer arrives three weeks later, I do not call that a discussion. It would take quite some time if we had to wait three weeks for an answer every time we discussed something. I do not call that a discussion. I call that a dialogue of the deaf.

Unfortunately, this answer came quite late. It is true that it came, but it was also released to all the media without allowing for a real discussion, without allowing the leaders to play their role, in other words to talk together to find a way to manage the situation. What about the mutual respect that we should have in this House? If this is transparency, if this is sunny ways, then we will seriously take a pass.

The dictionary definition of arrogant is, "unduly appropriating authority or importance". What better way to describe this government?

Privilege

In closing, the government needs to see reason. It needs to take measures to ensure that no member is ever prevented from doing their work. It needs to drop its idea of changing parliamentary procedural rules without the unanimous consent of the members of the House.

• (1520)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by my colleague and friend from Mégantic—L'Érable. He spoke for about twenty minutes, but I heard him say little about the actual subject, which is the lack of access to the House of Commons in order to vote. This is a very important matter that we must consider, a problem that we must solve. This happens in almost every Parliament.

I would like to know whether my colleague wishes to send this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as quickly as possible to study this problem in order to find a solution and ensure that it never happens again. Or does he want to continue speaking in this place for a very long time and prevent us from working on solving the problem?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, it is rather ironic because there was a closure motion yesterday and another today.

We are prepared to speak and to express our opinion. I believe that people expect us to talk about this question of privilege, and that is what I am doing. I know that my colleague was here for part of my speech and that he listened to what I had to say. However, he should have understood that my speech was about parliamentarians' privileges. These privileges give us the right to unfettered access to this place. These privileges give us the right to speak freely and to represent our constituents without any constraints. The opposition is fighting so that the government's backbenchers can enjoy these privileges and their power. That is what my honourable colleague should have understood and retained from my long 20-minute speech.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question has to do with my colleague's speech.

Does he know what drove the Liberals' 180 on this issue? They first time the question of privilege came up, they totally shut down debate instead of taking the stance that a committee should look at the issue, which is what they are saying now. After a few hours, they decided that was enough, they did not want to hear another word about it, and they would not send it to committee. Now they are telling us this issue has to go to committee as quickly as possible and the debate has to end.

Can the member tell me why the Liberals reversed their stance on referring this issue to committee? The first time we talked about this, they said it was out of the question and shut down debate. Now they are saying we need to expedite things and send the question to committee immediately.

• (1525)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that observation, which is very relevant to this debate. Indeed, we have seen this government flip-flop more than once over the past few weeks.

The government seems to flip-flop every day now, because it is reacting to the public service and to what the newspapers are saying. The government does not control Parliament, and that is what it wants. It is trying to do so, but it is realizing that, fortunately, there are parliamentary rules and traditions that prevent it from doing whatever it wants. The reality has caught up with them.

My hon. colleague saw it for himself, as the government tried to cut off the debate, which addresses a very important matter, a question of privilege. Certain impediments prevented some members from voting. Our rules and traditions are what protected them. That is precisely what we are standing up for, and that is precisely why we are here and why the government realized that it had to back down. It did a complete 180, and now it wants to send this question of privilege to committee.

That is another trick. The government wants to do this because it wants to put an end to our filibuster. The government realized that we figured out what it is up to with the changes it is making to the rules and procedures of the House. It realized that changes like that could not be passed without unanimous consent. The government realized that the opposition would not stand for what it is doing. That is another reason why the government keeps flip-flopping.

As the editorial writer said this morning, it is not necessary. The opposition has a role to play and it will continue to play that role.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were here today because of the issue of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. This is not the first time. In fact, in recent years I have had to deal with it at the procedures and House affairs committee. Prior to going to PROC, it justifies a few hours of debate; then there is a vote, and it goes to committee.

Now, on the other hand, there is a hidden agenda coming from the Conservative Party on this issue. The member actually made reference to it, and I applaud him for doing so, but other members of the Conservative Party have also made reference to it, and for them, it is all about filibustering. They are filibustering on a matter of privilege, the issue of access, which every member of the House takes very seriously, with the exception, it would appear, of some from the Conservative benches, who want to manipulate this issue in a very irresponsible fashion. That is what we see when opposition members admit this is a filibuster.

They are debating it today because they want to have a filibuster on the very important issue of unfettered access. I know the constituents I represent would like to see a modernized Parliament. They would like to ensure that all members have unfettered access to the chamber. I believe they would be disappointed in the irresponsible behaviour of the Conservatives, because there is a responsibility for the official opposition to also be responsible inside the House. Today we have not witnessed responsible opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to respond. Once a day is enough. I will answer the question.

Privilege

The hon. parliamentary secretary has a lot of experience in the House, but, unfortunately, he does not seem to have listened to my colleagues' speeches. I think that the parliamentary secretary is talking about tricks. He is talking about all of the tools that the opposition has at its disposal to make itself heard. However, we, the opposition, are not making our own voices heard. We are making the voices of Canadians heard. Canadians are saying, through us and all of the methods at our disposal, that this government is going too far. They are saying that this government is using tricks. We have been talking about a discussion paper. Let us look back at what has happened. The government presented a discussion paper. Discussion means that we talk but that no decisions are made. First development: the discussion paper was sent to committee and, all of a sudden, a decision has to be made and the government will impose it, if necessary.

That is what happened. It was another trick. Fortunately opposition members saw through it. Fortunately, my colleagues saw through it. That is why it is important to remember that the rule for accessing Parliament is not the only important rule. All our rules are important. Some members, my colleagues, were prevented from coming to vote here and this government is trying to take away our right to speak. It is trying to take away our right to represent our constituents.

That is what the parliamentary secretary, my hon. colleague, should have understood during our interventions. That is the truth.

• (1530)

[English]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the comments on that side of the House very interesting. In light of the current history of this Liberal government in trying to change the Standing Orders, shutting down debate, invoking closure, today's events at the procedures and House affairs committee, and removing opposition day motions, I wonder if my colleague could comment on how much confidence he feels that these issues, which are so important, will be dealt with at the PROC committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the answer is in the question.

The fact that this type of question even needs to be asked in the House shows that there is a problem. We have noticed that there is a problem that affects every member on this side of the House. This problem also exists for the members across the way, but it especially affects the backbench Liberal MPs who are also getting tired of this procedural wrangling.

There is a simple solution. All the government has to do is get rid of the threat hanging over the opposition that our rules are going to be changed without consensus or unanimous consent, and then everything will be just fine.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to participate in the debate on the question of privilege.

For some Canadians, this debate may seem a bit antiquated, a bit technical. They may not fully understand what it is we are talking

about. Notwithstanding that, let us make no mistake about it that the debate today is of high importance, because it goes to the foundations of our democracy. It goes to the heart of the ability of members of Parliament to perform their functions to collectively represent Canadians.

Having regard for the importance of this debate on privilege, it is disappointing to see that the current Liberal government has responded by trying to shut down debate, by trying to silence members of Parliament by bringing forward time allocation.

Canadians will remember that during the last election, the Prime Minister talked so much about sunny ways. He waxed and waned eloquently. He talked about how there would be sunlight brought into this place and how everything would be wonderful, that members would be able to speak and vote freely and that we would have a government that respected the will of Parliament, and he admonished the previous Conservative government for bringing in time allocation, which of course is perfectly within the rules. It is in the Standing Orders.

That was fair. There were a lot of Canadians who accepted that, who said that perhaps Parliament could work better, and they entrusted the Prime Minister to deliver. What we have seen, like so much of what we see from the Prime Minister, is that the words that he espoused during the election campaign were nothing more than empty words, because on this issue he has tried to shut down debate.

The government is trying to shut down debate, but it is not just on this issue. It is on multiple issues. The government has moved time allocation more than a dozen times already. What is even worse is that the government House leader has now indicated that the government will use this issue as a pretext to invoke time allocation on a regular basis, so we have now a complete 180° turnaround from the government. Eighteen or 19 months ago, the Liberals were admonishing the previous Conservative government for imposing time allocation, and today the government House leader is talking about bringing in time allocation all the time, regularly, and with enthusiasm.

It really speaks to the lack of trust that Canadians should have in the current government. I think that every day more and more Canadians recognize that the current government simply cannot be trusted.

To the substance of this important debate on this issue of privilege, it arose on the day of the budget when access by the hon. members for Beauce and Milton to the parliamentary precinct to be able to get into this chamber and vote was impeded. Their access was impeded when they tried to access a House of Commons bus to come to the chamber to vote, to do what hon. members should do. The bells were ringing. They waited. They saw a bus coming. The bus driver apparently saw them, but the bus could not get to them because the bus was stopped. It was blocked by either the Prime Minister's empty motorcade or a media bus or a combination of the two. Nonetheless, it was blocked, and it was blocked, according to the hon. member for Beauce, for some nine minutes. As a result, the hon. members for Milton and Beauce were unable to vote.

Privilege

● (1535)

Upon the conclusion of that vote, those hon. members rose in their places and immediately alerted this House that their access to this House had been impeded, that they had been prevented from doing the job that their constituents had sent them here to do and doing what their constituents expect them to do, which is to vote on matters before the House of Commons, and that consequently there had been a breach of their parliamentary privilege.

Upon hearing the evidence from the hon. members for Beauce and Milton, Mr. Speaker, you ruled that there was indeed a *prima facie* breach of a member's privilege.

What should have happened then, and what has always happened upon the Speaker's finding of a *prima facie* breach of privilege, was for a debate to take place in this chamber, for a vote to take place, and in the event that the members of this House affirmed the ruling of the Speaker in finding that there was in fact a breach of privilege, the matter would then be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs so that the issue of privilege could be studied and the committee could get to the bottom of exactly what happened.

That is not what happened in this case. What should have happened did not happen because the government decided instead that it wanted to attack the rights of hon. members to defend and protect the privileges of this House. What the government did in that regard was to bring forward a motion to proceed to orders of the day. In so doing, what the government did was shut down the ability of hon. members to debate the issue of privilege, to vote on the issue of privilege, and to have the matter referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where it would have received precedence at that committee, just as it receives precedence in this House upon the Speaker's finding.

What the government did was unprecedented. No government before has done what the current government did. What the current government did was very serious. It was fundamentally an attack on this place. It was an attack on this institution and on all hon. members, because the ability to debate and vote on a question of privilege is no small matter. It is significant. It is fundamental. It is fundamental to the ability of members of Parliament to perform the functions of the member of Parliament. It is fundamental to the ability of members of Parliament to do their job. That is why privilege is not the property of the government; it is the property of this chamber and it is the property of all 338 members of Parliament.

To understand the significance of what the government tried to do, it is perhaps important to have some understanding of the history of privilege, the foundation of privilege.

Privilege goes back centuries. It goes back to the 14th and 15th centuries, to the United Kingdom, when the king would interfere, impede, obstruct, use force, and in some cases arrest hon. members of Parliament, attacking and impeding their ability to do their jobs.

● (1540)

Sir Thomas More was one of the first speakers in the House of Commons who petitioned the king for the recognition of certain privileges of the House. Those privileges included the right to be free from interference, obstruction, and use of force by the king and his

executive in the House of Lords. What privilege really is and what it turned out to be was a compromise among the king, the executive, and members of Parliament, that Parliament, the House of Commons, would be a place where members could speak freely, debate freely, criticize, and depose the government without interference from the executive.

In Canada, privilege was imported from the United Kingdom. The type of force, arrests, and intimidation that British members of Parliament had endured in the 14th and 15th centuries had passed. By the time of Canada's Confederation, however, what had not passed was the significance of members' parliamentary privilege. That is why parliamentary privilege was enshrined in our Constitution. Section 18 of the Constitution Act of 1867, provides that the House may define members' privileges provided that those privileges do not exceed the privileges enjoyed by members of the British House of Commons at the time of Confederation in 1867.

Indeed, the House, through the act of Parliament, adopted all those privileges. Among those privileges is freedom from obstruction and interference. That is precisely what this question of privilege relates to: the interference of the hon. members for Beauce and Milton's access to the chamber to perform the most important function of a member of Parliament, and that is to stand and vote on behalf of their constituents.

When we are talking about the issue of privilege, we are talking about something that has been constitutionally protected. We are talking about something that has been protected by our courts. We are talking about something that has been protected by the common law. It is why what the government sought to do to prevent members of Parliament from having an opportunity to debate and vote on privilege is so significant.

When the arguments were put forward to the government about the seriousness of what was happening and the consequences of what was happening, the response of the government was, more or less, that it did not care. Given some of the actions of the government, when it comes to the disrespect it has exhibited to this institution, perhaps we should not be surprised that this was its attitude. However, Canadians should be surprised that, one by one, Liberal MP after Liberal MP stood and voted in favour of the government's extinguishing the ability of members of Parliament to defend and protect their privileges.

● (1545)

It seems a lot of members over there perhaps forgot, or maybe they do not care, that they are not members of the government, other than those Liberal MPs who are members of cabinet. Perhaps they lost sight of the fact that members' privileges are privileges that do not just protect opposition members and enable them to do their work on behalf of their constituents. Members' privileges protect all members of the House, including government backbench MPs so they can carry out their jobs as well.

It is unfortunate that it took the hon. member for Perth—Wellington, my colleague, to stand and question whether the government could in fact shut down a debate on privilege without a vote. He argued that it was a violation of privilege.

Privilege

You, Mr. Speaker, agreed with the hon. member for Perth—Wellington. As a result of that ruling, we are having a debate on this question of privilege. It should not have happened that way. It need not have happened that way. However, it happened because of the arrogance of the government.

It does raise a question as to how that happened and why it happened. Why was the government so determined to extinguish the rights of hon. members to defend members' privileges? The answer is that had the motion passed the House of Commons, it would have been referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where it would have received precedence, just as it receives precedence in this chamber. That happened to be an inconvenience to the government because the government was simultaneously trying to ram through, at the procedure and House affairs committee, the rules of this place, the rules in terms of how Parliament functioned. The government was trying to strip the rights and abilities of hon. members of the House to hold the government to account, and so we got this mess.

The government has backed off a little in terms of its efforts to ram through changes in the procedure and House affairs committee. However, while it backed off a little at the procedure and House affairs committee, it nonetheless remained intent on shutting down debate on a most important question of privilege.

What the government has done, and is doing, is wrong. It is undemocratic. It is an attack on all members of Parliament and, as a result, it is an attack on all Canadians. When the abilities of members of Parliament to speak and represent their constituents is impeded upon, that impacts all Canadians who count on us to represent them here every day.

My colleagues in the opposition will continue to do what is necessary to hold the government to account, to call on the government to respect the House, to respect this institution, to respect the ability of members of Parliament to stand and vote on behalf of their constituents, and to respect the privileges afforded to all hon. members in the House.

• (1550)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's debate is in fact about unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

As I indicated before, this is not the first time we have had to deal with this issue. In fact, if we go back, May 12, 2015, was the most recent incident prior to this. During that debate, a total of five speakers—three New Democrats, one Liberal, and the Green Party representative—spoke to that matter of privilege.

We have had 37 speakers, and that was even before we started today. We also know that members of the Conservative Party have said that this matter of privilege is all about a filibuster. There is a responsibility of the opposition, especially the official opposition, to behave in a more responsible fashion in dealing with the issue of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

I would suggest there are in fact some games being played, and it is not fair to point the finger in one direction. All parties need to take

a look at what they are doing, especially on this issue with respect to the Conservative Party.

Does the member believe there is a responsibility of the official opposition to behave in a responsible fashion when it comes to debate? If we had 338 members debate everything that came before the House, it would take over five weeks to do one measure, and we might have 100 more measures to do. Mathematically, it is just not possible, unless we have a Conservative opposition that has one purpose and one purpose alone, and that is try to demonstrate it is dysfunctional. If it is dysfunctional, it is because of an incompetent, unreasonable official opposition. It does not take much. Give me 12 members and I can cause havoc, too. It does not mean it is responsible.

I am challenging the member across the way to acknowledge that there is an onus of responsibility for the official opposition to do the right thing. Maybe the member could tell us why the Conservatives have chosen to filibuster this matter of privilege, if it is so important.

• (1555)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question, or perhaps statement, of the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, I am a little taken aback that he would have the audacity to talk about this question of privilege going to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That is precisely what the government tried to prevent from happening. The government tried to shut down an opportunity for the committee on procedure and House affairs to get to the bottom of this issue.

It is the government that tried to do so. The only reason it backed down, although it never really did back down, was the hon. member for Perth—Wellington stood and said that it did not have a right to do it, and the Speaker agreed with him.

We are going to continue to fight against the effort on the part of the government to roll back the rights and privileges of hon. members. It is unbelievable the member would talk about the procedure and House affairs committee, because it was exactly that, as I said, the government tried to prevent from getting to the bottom of this issue.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague gave a very intelligent discourse on this issue.

One of the words that comes to mind is “privilege”. As I have experienced an incident in which I was not allowed to get into the House in the past term, I understand what that privilege means.

One thing outside of our House, for people to better understand this, is that we all understand that doctors have privileges, for example, to work in health facilities. If that privilege were stopped, the outcry from the public if doctors were not allowed to get to an emergency department to see their patients would be huge.

I would like to ask my colleague if he could expound further on what this discussion we are having here means to our citizens, and how critically important it is to us.

Privilege

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. The ability of an hon. member to access this House in order to vote on a matter before the House is of utmost importance. Indeed, there is nothing more important in terms of the function of a member of Parliament than to stand up and vote on matters before the House on behalf of their constituents. That is what our constituents elect us to do. Unfortunately, in the case of the hon. member for Milton and the hon. member for Beauce, that privilege was infringed upon when they were prevented from getting here. That is why this debate is so important.

In terms of the consequences of what could have happened, one consequence was that two hon. members were not able to stand in their place on behalf of 100,000 or so constituents. That is a pretty significant consequence, but it could have been an even worse consequence if we had been talking about a vote of confidence. The inability of the members to access this House, to show up and vote, could have the consequence of literally resulting in a potential loss of confidence in the government. We are talking about very serious consequences that could flow from the privileges of members being infringed upon in terms of being able to access this place.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on a theme that was raised by the hon. member across the floor, and that is acting responsibly and respectfully. What is the responsibility of the Liberal government to act responsibly and respectfully in the House, and what needs to change to get us there?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the government could start by respecting the ability and right of hon. members to debate this question of privilege by backing down on trying to shut down debate.

A second thing the government could do is respect the fact that before it changes the rules of the House, in order to do so, there must be consensus. That has been the tradition. I know the government House leader has backed down somewhat on the government's intent to change the Standing Orders, but she has not committed to doing so on the basis of consensus. That would be a second major thing the government could do to show it finally does have respect for this place and for members of Parliament. However, I do not have a lot of confidence in the government when it comes to doing that. We see no indication that it is prepared to do that.

For the government, it really comes down to how far it can go and get away with it. We saw that last spring when the government introduced Motion No. 6 to literally try to take away every tool that was available to opposition members to do their jobs to hold the government to account. It only backed down after that unfortunate incident involving the Prime Minister. Then we saw the government try to prevent a vote in the House on the ability of members to defend the privileges of members. The government was stopped as a result of my hon. colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington, raising a new question of privilege and the Speaker ruling on it.

Now we see that the government has sort of backed down on changes to the Standing Orders, but only partly. It would not surprise me, given the arrogance and attitude of the government, that before much longer we will see another effort to try to do what it has not been able to get away with yet. Canadians should be very concerned.

● (1600)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad indeed to participate in this debate.

I want to address the problem that faces us as we decide on this matter of privilege to face the fact that we are going to be sending this question of privilege to a committee which has itself largely broken down. It is a committee in which the spirit has been adopted by the current government of running roughshod over the traditional rights and privileges of the opposition. These are privileges that are the practical basis on which the opposition can carry out its job of ensuring proper scrutiny of what the government does, ensuring that government business can be slowed down and examined at sufficient length so that if there is a problem with it, it can then be brought to the attention of the Canadian public. This would allow the Canadian public to then say they expect changes, thereby pressuring the government, which after all wants to win the next election, into respecting the wishes of the people and changing its policy.

That is what the opposition does under our system. It is what the opposition has always done under our system. It is a good way of organizing things. That is why these rules have evolved over time, over centuries. It is why they have been maintained over the decades of the past century. It is why we have, among other things, concluded as a parliamentary community that we ought not to change the Standing Orders without the consent of all parties. That, of course, is the approach that all the opposition parties want to take right now. It is the approach that was taken under the Harper government and under the Chrétien government. T

here have been very few occasions on which changes to the Standing Orders have been pushed through without the consent of the opposition, and that is a very good thing. Those changes that have been pushed through without consent are almost invariably, but they are invariably, changes that have had the effect of stripping the opposition of its ability to do its job on behalf of Canadians, and therefore of destroying, in part, the constitutional apparatus. When I say constitutional I mean that in the traditional British sense of how we conduct legislation in a Westminster system in Canada.

The practices on the committee that have veered so far from what is acceptable need to be enumerated here, and I propose to do that today.

At the committee on March 21, a motion was introduced at an in camera session, and in all fairness, it was a session that started off in camera and then went public. A Liberal member of Parliament proposed that all changes to the Standing Orders would be implemented and a report submitted to the House of Commons by June 2. This was effectively a way of ensuring that a single report containing all the necessary provisions, everything the Liberals wanted, would be produced. There could be a dissenting report, I guess, but there would be no option of trying to place limits on what gets agreed to by saying that no, the opposition does not support this or that particular change to the Standing Orders, including ones that had never been contemplated in the Liberal election platform or discussed with the Canadian public. All of these could be pushed through at the government's discretion.

Privilege

Lest anyone suffer from the illusion that we had any idea of which policy option would be preferred, we have a government discussion paper which includes a whole range of topics, some of which contradict each other. We would either sit on Fridays and make them full days or not sit on any Fridays. Numerous other options were put out there which could not be compatible with each other. New items could be added in and the government would not indicate it. At no point between that day and this day would the Liberals ever indicate which of these items were the ones that were their bottom line, so we never knew. We had no security at all. We were told to have a discussion and the Liberals would not provide us with any details; we would get to find out once we had consented to allow them to move forward with the motion. Of course, we opposed that.

• (1605)

I proposed an amendment to this motion in that committee which said that we would still maintain the June 2 deadline, but we would only have such changes to the Standing Orders as had the unanimous consent of all members of that committee. This followed the practice established in the past and actually spelled out in the House orders during the last Parliament in which Jean Chrétien was our prime minister. That is what we proposed. For the intervening period between March 21 and today, that is all we discussed, endlessly.

The first big surprise and the first deviation from appropriate practices came immediately after I proposed that amendment. This would have been on March 21 at the end of the normally scheduled meeting. We started the meeting at 11 a.m., as the procedure and House affairs committee always does. We were getting close to one o'clock, which is our normal time for adjournment. I proposed my amendment, expecting that we would come back if we stayed on this topic and deal with it at our next meeting, which would have taken place two days later, on March 23, but the chair at the appointed time for adjournment said, effectively—I do not have his exact words in front of me, but they are in the committee *Hansard*—that we were not going to adjourn because the chair may not adjourn without the consent of the majority of committee members; it is not in the power of the chair to adjourn, and the Liberal members indicated they did not want to adjourn. The purpose of this quite clearly was to keep the debate going until the opposition ran out of steam and then the government would simply push through its motion in that committee and that would result in the Standing Orders being unilaterally changed in a way that could not be controlled or modified in any way by the opposition in that committee.

At that time, I argued that the chair was misinterpreting the practices of the House. There is no standing order that says the chair cannot adjourn the committee without the expressed consent of the majority of the committee at the time when the committee normally adjourns. However, the chair argued back that no, he cannot adjourn. He went on at some length that he could not do this, and so in the end we had no choice. We could hardly stand up and walk out of the committee. That would result in the Liberals getting what they wanted, and subverting all of our rules, all of our protections, so we had no choice but to talk and talk. We started a filibuster, which has become the longest filibuster, to the best of my knowledge, in the history of this country. Until it was adjourned this morning, in that committee it was still March 21. Instead of being adjourned, the meetings would be suspended, and we would come back sometimes after a break of a day or two days and on one occasion most recently

after a break of two weeks, but always to the fiction that it was still March 21.

It is one thing for us all to see the clock as a certain time in order to wrap up the proceedings of a committee or of the House early, or to do the opposite and see the clock as being a little earlier than it actually is to allow the committee to go on a bit longer. I used to do this all the time when I chaired the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. I would say to the committee members, and members can examine the committee *Hansard* to see this, “I see the clock as not yet being 2 p.m.” When we looked at the clock it was clearly 2 p.m., which was when we adjourned, but as long as no other member disagreed, that allowed us to maintain the official fiction that it was prior to 2 p.m., so that we could continue hearing witness testimony. We would hear heartbreaking stories about people who had been tortured and murdered in other countries. It was our job to listen to this testimony and then make use of it in preparing our reports. I always sought the consent of the committee in that matter, but I understood that a meeting ends at the time it is scheduled to end. The chair took a different position.

Then today he came to our meeting. We met at 9:02 a.m. The chair said, “It being 9:02 on May 5”, not maintaining this fiction that it is March 21, “good morning. Welcome back to the 55th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This meeting is being televised. Prior to our suspension on April 13, the committee was debating” the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston’s “amendment to [the] motion. Also, I’ll bring to your attention the two excellent papers we asked for, done by our researcher, one on the standing orders in Quebec’s National Assembly dealing with omnibus bills, and the other one on the historical contents of budget implementation bills.”

Referring to the debate that is happening right now, he said, “It is my understanding that all parties have signalled their intention to support the subamendment and amendment on the question of privilege currently being debated in the House. As members know, when this question comes to a vote it means that ultimately this committee will be seized with the matter of access of members to the parliamentary precinct. Given this information, I’m happy to say that this 55th meeting finally stands adjourned.”

• (1610)

He then gavelled us out.

There are two problems with this procedurally. This is the same chair who said that a meeting cannot be adjourned without the consent of the members of the committee. Now he said that he was adjourning it. He made no effort to even look up from his papers. He adjourned the meeting of the committee without the consent of the members. Unlike the previous occasion, when we actually had arrived at the pre-scheduled end time of the meeting, this was in the middle of the meeting.

Privilege

This was clearly in violation of the traditional practice in this House that the chair cannot adjourn a meeting. It is not a standing order. It is a practice to ensure that chairs cannot adjourn meetings in the middle of a meeting, in the middle of a proceeding, to prevent some item of business from being dealt with or to prevent discussion.

Our name is Parliament. *Parlement*. Medieval French is where this came from. It is a place to speak. Our default setting is to be able to continue debate, and he shut that down in a way that violated the practice of this place, as stated on page 1087 of O'Brien and Bosc:

The committee Chair cannot adjourn the meeting without the consent of a majority of the members, unless the Chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.

That is something that would only occur in the middle of a meeting, not when we have arrived at the end and are past our time. The chair has violated this rule twice. Once was by misusing it to justify keeping a meeting going indefinitely. That particular meeting started at 11 a.m. and concluded at 3 a.m. and then was picked up after a suspension the next day and the next.

The second was by actually overtly and egregiously adjourning the meeting a minute into a meeting that was expected to be several hours long, and, I might add, in the midst of me attempting to raise a point of order on this very point. I stated, "point of order." He heard me and chose to ignore me. That was an egregious, deliberate, and overt abuse not of the practices but of the Standing Orders. This is the committee to which we propose to send items of privilege, a committee chaired by someone willing to violate the practices and the Standing Orders of this place.

That is one problem. Let me talk about something else that was wrong in the way this was done. It was with respect to the suspension of the committee. What the chair did at the end of the first meeting, the first sitting of this committee, which started on March 21 at 11 a.m. and carried on until 3 a.m. the next morning, was suspend, suddenly and without warning, and we came back the next day, I believe at noon. After that, the tendency was to suspend at midnight and come back later on.

Let me give members an idea of just what I am talking about. They will see the importance of this in a second. We started on March 21 at 11:05 a.m. There were a number of brief suspensions for votes during the day. We then suspended at 3 a.m. There is an oddity here. It says we suspended on March 21 officially, but it was really March 22, until noon the next day. On March 22, we then suspended until March 23 at 10:30 a.m. We then suspended and recommenced on March 24 and then again on March 25. On March 25, there was a suspension during a break week. We suspended on March 25 at 11 a.m., and we returned on April 3 at noon. We suspended on April 3, coming back on April 5. We suspended on April 5 and came back on April 6. On April 6, we suspended and came back on April 7. On April 7, we suspended and came back on April 11. On April 11, we suspended and came back on April 12. On April 12, we suspended until April 13. On April 13, we suspended and came back on May 2, today, and we had this adjournment.

• (1615)

I want to talk about what O'Brien and Bosc say about suspensions. They say:

Committees frequently suspend their meetings for various reasons, with the intention to resume later in the day. Suspensions may last a few seconds, or several hours, depending on the circumstances, and a meeting may be suspended more than once.

So far, so good:

The committee Chair must clearly announce the suspension, so that transcription ceases until the meeting resumes. Meetings are suspended, for example, to change from public to *in camera* mode, or the reverse, to enable witnesses to be seated or to hear witnesses by video conference, to put an end to disorder, to resolve a problem with the simultaneous interpretation system, or to move from one item on the agenda to the next.

It also notes:

Speaker Milliken expressed reservations about the power of a committee to suspend proceedings to the next day....

This is not something that is an approved practice. I then looked up Speaker Milliken's ruling, delivered on June 3, 2003. He stated that it was inappropriate. It was not a breach of the rules or the Standing Orders but a breach of precedence for the chair of the Standing Committee on Transportation to suspend a meeting on May 28 and resume it on May 29.

He said:

Your Speaker is...somewhat troubled by the notion of an overnight suspension of proceedings. As hon. members know, if the Speaker's attention is drawn to a lack of quorum and no quorum is found, the House must adjourn forthwith. While it may be argued that no such obligation exists for committees, I would not consider the unorthodox actions of the transport committee in this particular instance to be a precedent in committee practice.

This is a quorum issue that caused them to suspend.

In other words, their suspension to be back the next day was not a precedent that says that this is acceptable. This is not an acceptable practice, and that was a situation in which a committee suspended once for 24 hours.

Here is a situation where the committee suspended 10 times for breaks ranging from 24 hours to two weeks. This was not a suspension. This was adjournment and reconvening of the committee. To this chair's credit, when I asked him, he started to let us know what the next time we would be coming back would be, and he started to let us know when our next suspension would be so we could at least plan.

However, initially, in this particular situation, the government members apparently knew when the suspension would be, but the rest of us, who had to keep the debate going, were hamstrung. These are all examples of an absolutely egregious abuse of the way in which this place works.

I intend, now that I have seen how these particular practices have been abused, to come back with proposals to change the Standing Orders to make sure that suspensions are used as suspensions, not as adjournments, and to make sure that the rule, the practice on adjournment, is actually put down as a Standing Order. We cannot adjourn a meeting as the chair in the middle of a meeting, but at the end of a meeting, we cannot keep the meeting going unless we have the consent of the majority of the committee. Hopefully that will remove some of the abuses that have gone on in this committee.

Privilege

Let me just say this. There is a pattern here, not just in this committee but in the government, of absolutely having no regard for the traditional way we have done things. This is a majority government. It has enormous power. The powers of a Canadian prime minister far exceed those of an American president, far exceed them, domestically speaking, but they are not the powers of a dictator. The rules that keep them from being the powers of a dictator are the ones that are incorporated in our Standing Orders and in the respect we all have, until recently all had, for the practices of this place.

These are slender threads that preserve our liberties, but they are vital. We should not sweep them aside, and I encourage all members to take great caution not to allow this practice on this committee to become the practice of the House or of the committees in the future.

● (1620)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member himself changed the Standing Orders for the election of the Speaker, for which we used to have a runoff ballot, he brought in a ranked ballot system. Forty per cent of the members of the House actually opposed that.

Why the double standard? Why did the member not seek unanimous consent when he wanted to change the rules?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I hope you will not object if I take a moment to give context to the comments of my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North.

In the last Parliament, I proposed a motion to amend the Standing Orders and when that motion came before the House, it was voted on in a free vote. All members of the Liberal Party, with one exception, voted in favour of it. About two-thirds of Conservatives voted in favour of it, and about 20 NDP members voted in favour of it. The member's point is that we do not have unanimous consent and, therefore, it would be hypocritical for me to be advocating unanimous consent for changes to the Standing Orders, which was not the matter I was addressing. I was addressing abuses on the procedure and House affairs committee. However, let me deal with this.

What happened was that proposal to change the Standing Orders went to the House, it was then sent to the procedure and House affairs committee. The procedure and House affairs committee made a unanimous recommendation that the matter be referred back to the House of Commons without a recommendation in favour of or against, and that all parties consider the possibility of engaging in a free vote on the matter, which was done. If we follow, there was all-party consent on this matter at committee, which is what I have been arguing all along. If the member goes back and examines the record, he will see that I have always said that we need all-party consent.

In the context of the procedure and House affairs committee, that means unanimous consent. It does not mean I am trying to suggest that if we change things here, we should give any one member of Parliament the ability to stop the change from going forward. I am saying all-party consent, and that practice existed in the past. That was the practice, for example, in the committee I mentioned under the Chrétien government, where all party House leaders were members of a committee. It was the committee that had to approve

changes, not a member of the House of Commons but every member of that committee, every party, in other words. That practice was followed with the changes that I proposed and that were eventually adopted with regard to the election of the Speaker. They are the practices that should be maintained for all future standing order changes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my friend, as I do for a number of folks on all sides of the House, who deeply enrich themselves with the knowledge and history of this place. It is important that all sides have members who dedicate themselves to that conversation, because we all are actors passing across the stage. We are here for a time, we never how long, and yet we must maintain and, I would argue, improve the quality of what Parliament does on behalf of Canadians. The issue we are debating now is the ability of members just to get into the House to vote on behalf of their constituents, a motion which, by the way, the Liberals tried to kill at one point in these proceedings, which is ironic to a detrimental level.

We have been talking about the rules that govern us as members of Parliament representing our constituents and that the long-standing tradition by prime ministers throughout history was to never change those rules unless all parties agreed, simply because it is a good test. Otherwise, one could imagine a government with a majority, a false majority, in this case, changing the rules to its own advantage over the opposition. We all recognize that a majority government has enormous strength and power to pass through its agenda, yet the role of the opposition to hold it to account is central to everything we do.

The Liberals are using the line that they would not give a veto to the Conservatives over one of the Liberal election pledges. Ironically, that did not stop them from breaking their pledge on electoral reform. They themselves broke that with no help from anybody else. However, this notion that it went from an election pledge to somehow override the long-standing and important tradition that we as parliamentarians try to make the place better seems to me a distortion of the power of a promise ill-defined and badly made at some point by some political leader in the middle of a campaign versus the strength and integrity of the House of Commons.

I have a frank question for my friend, which I might ask in private but am asking in public. He mentioned the pattern we were seeing from the government, which came in with great promise to make Parliament better, to be more open and transparent about the way to conduct ourselves, yet has demonstrated its tendency to want to override the will of Parliament, to distort the power that already exists in its favour. Can that pattern be broken or has this ship simply sailed too far away to get it back to some level of sanity and decency?

● (1625)

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am shocked and appalled to discover that member introducing electoral reform into one of his comments.

● (1630)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It just came to me.

Privilege

Mr. Scott Reid: It is the obvious analogy, Mr. Speaker. There is one distinction between the electoral reform promise that the government gave and the promise it gave here, which is that the electoral reform promise was dramatic in terms of timing.

The promise was that this would be the last first-past-the-post election. It was not clear what the government was going to replace it with. When we proposed on the electoral reform committee to give the government free rein to choose any system that it saw fit as long as it then introduced that system to the Canadian public in a referendum vote and as long as that system was five or less on the Gallagher index, which means highly proportional, it was at that point that the Prime Minister fessed up and said he was only ever willing to consider preferential voting.

That was good to learn. It would have been nice to have known that in 2015. I suspect that a number of ridings might have gone NDP but for the fact that some of their swing voters went Liberal. We might now have NDP members there had this promise been clarified at that time, as opposed to after the fact.

The member asked if the ship can be turned around. I would suggest that the House is doing the work of turning it around.

On the electoral reform issue, it is unfortunate that the whole shebang ground to a halt. Should it arise in the future, the nature of that debate will be very different as a result of the clarification that we collectively brought to that discussion.

Here too we see that a number of the items that were on the Liberal agenda, such as programming motions, which was the most devastatingly bad of all the ideas the Liberals had, are off the agenda. Here the idea was essentially to do what they were going to do on procedure and House affairs, which is shut down debate and make it impossible to move forward, but we have now come to a resolution. I think those are off the agenda. The government House leader said in her letter that they are off the agenda, and on this one I take her at her word. That is progress, but it is unfortunate that we have to achieve progress in this way.

However, that is the idea of the Westminster system. The government's feet are actually held to the fire. It is not a very pleasant process for the government and it may not be a pretty process from the point of view of the Canadian public, but I am not sure we are after a system that is pretty. We are after a system that in the long run delivers incrementally better and better government, and on this matter, despite other philosophical differences between me and my colleague, we are 100% in accord.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I had in mind a longer question, but given your injunction, I am wondering if the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston has had any opportunity to look at the proposals I have made for changing our standing rules and if he sees merit in any of them.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I cannot do justice to the hon. member's quite detailed and lengthy paper on changes to the Standing Orders. She came forward in good faith with a substantial number of proposals.

Rather than dealing with any of the specifics, I will make this observation. What she has done—and this is the best practice for any of us here—is she has looked at best practices of other Westminster

jurisdictions, of which there is a treasure trove, a cornucopia, and drawn upon some of those best practices. She has pointed in particular to themes of working consensually together. This is a theme that has animated the hon. member's work on electoral reform. It defines the kind of system she is working toward with electoral reform. She wants a system that makes us more consensual.

The same general thesis animates her proposals for working in the House. That is not easy in a Westminster system. We all know the famous story of our being two swords' lengths apart. I assume the purpose was to prevent us from actually stabbing each other, but that is not to say that we have to keep on doing that into the future. We can work more consensually, and the theme that she is proposing is a profound one that I hope will be picked up by members in all parties in the remainder of this Parliament.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend from Kootenay—Columbia.

It is indeed a privilege to rise today and speak in my best efforts on behalf of the people of Skeena—Bulkley Valley, the beautiful northwest of this great country. I use the word “privilege” very specifically.

I wonder if some of my Liberal colleagues might take their conversations elsewhere. It is a little distracting.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. Actually, that is a good point to make. I can hear the discussion happening from here. I want to remind everyone in the House that it is nice to see everyone talk and kibitz. However, if it is going to be at an elevated level, maybe members could just take it into the lobby.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, we do reference this place as Parliament, a place in which we speak, but it is tricky when we all do it at the same time. It is more akin to question period.

I use the word “privilege” in terms of speaking on behalf of the good people of northwestern British Columbia, because it is in fact exactly that. To be able to rise in this place and speak in our best efforts on behalf of those we represent is an honour that only a few of us get to hold over the many years that this country has existed.

It believe it is also right at the heart of the issue we are talking about today. This is called a question of privilege. For a lot of Canadians, it is very old language, a question of privilege. Privilege sounds like something very shiny and potentially valuable in wealth, which one is afforded. We all know “I am entitled to my entitlements” and all that sort of thing that has gone on in the past.

However, the privilege we speak about today is simply the privilege to speak. In this motion it is about access of members of Parliament to come and vote on behalf of their constituents, which is of course at the very most sacred core of our democracy. We elect people, and we put them forward to represent us. They speak on our behalf, but they also cast votes on our behalf.

Privilege

The incident that happened most recently with my friend the member for Milton and others was that they were physically prevented from getting into the House of Commons, which unfortunately seems to happen once every four or five years. MPs are trying to get up on the Hill and, because of some security measure or some other thing, they cannot get in.

Some in the public may say, “Big deal; the vote passed by 20 or 15 that night.” However, I have witnessed votes in this House that have been tied. I have witnessed votes of confidence over whether a government would stand or fall being supported by one extra member, keeping us from an election at one point. To say that it does not matter in the small example is missing the entire point of the larger example, which is that we all need free and fair access to this place to simply do our jobs.

Part of our job is voting. A second part of our job is the ability to hold government to account. The only members in this whole place who sit in government are the Prime Minister and the cabinet that the Prime Minister chooses.

The role of all the other MPs in this place, including government members who sit in the so-called backbench, is to hold government to account on two fundamental things: spending and laws; to look at the proposals that come forward from government, see if its spending is accurate and true to the nature of the promises made, and to see that legislation that passes before this place, whether it comes from an individual member or from the government itself, is of the best quality, using the best information.

The context in which we are debating this is important, not only the context of the Liberal government's recent pattern of becoming more and more forceful, more and more pushing its agenda onto an increasingly unwilling opposition, but also the context in which the government was elected into office. I would argue that the slogan of hope and hard work that the Prime Minister used to talk about was one that had a certain resonance and meaning for Canadians.

Clearly, the Liberals won the last election. Canadians were looking for something that was more hopeful, I would argue, more respectful of the conversation—not only the one that happens out in the larger public, true consultation, meaningful consultation around what it is that government wants to do, but also more respect for this place that is Parliament.

We saw the Harper government use the very powerful tool of prorogation, and a lot of Canadians did not even know what that word meant until the Prime Minister shut down Parliament entirely to avoid a vote of confidence at one point. The previous prime minister got into the routine and habit of just not liking a debate going on too long, and he would just shut down debate. There would be a quick vote, and 30 minutes later the debate was over and the bill was moving on.

The former government got so addicted to these tools that it would actually invoke shutting down debate as it introduced legislation. The debate would be 20 minutes old, and the government would bring in a motion to say that in another 30 minutes it would be over. Some of these bills were of enormous consequence to the lives of Canadians. That is a problem.

We can see how in government there is a certain intolerance that seems to grow, a resistance to scrutiny, particularly when a government gets into a bit of trouble or just starts to get tired of this whole procedure of Parliament that we have concocted over many centuries. That is too bad.

We also can recognize a majority government, and in this case, as in most majority governments in Canada, it is a false majority. A little less than 40% of Canadians who voted, voted to support the government. Liberals used to talk about that as a false majority and one of the reasons that we ought to change our voting system, as much of the world has.

● (1635)

It is also known that a majority government in Canada has inordinate power to see its agenda through. It is not as if debate takes an extra hour or two, or a day or two and the government is going to lose that vote if it is whipping the vote on its side, which governments often do. It is all a question of timing and sequence, and can we simply hold the government to account. Sometimes that means holding the government to some pause. As it wants to ram its agenda through, as it wants to get a bill through or a budget through, it feels that sense of urgency, but it maybe has not done all the scrutiny, has not looked at it from all sides, which is kind of the point. Some of these laws do not get changed for 40 or 50 years and if they are badly done, it takes things like Supreme Court challenges to fix them, which are incredibly expensive. Rather than get them right and take the time to do it, governments sometimes want to rush things.

We see this pattern creeping out, not just into the House of Commons but into the committee. We saw this at the procedure and House affairs committee earlier today where, suddenly, the chair woke up, decided he wanted the meeting to be over, smashed the gavel, and then suddenly it was over.

This is clearly the opposite of the promise the Prime Minister brought in. If we ask Canadians the question, aside from being a prime minister, what did Prime Ministers Chrétien, Mulroney, Harper, Martin, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau all have in common? A lot of Canadians would say not much. What did Harper have in common with Chrétien and Chrétien with Mulroney? They had one thing common. They believed in the tradition of this place. If we were going to change the rules, if we were going to change the way we interacted with one another, if we were going to change the balance of power between the government, which we recognized is subsequent, and the power of the opposition, then we clearly needed to have all the parties in the conversation, not at the end of a barrel of a gun, saying that if we did not agree the government would do it anyway. That is not a conversation. That is not a consultation. That is a farce.

Privilege

The long-standing and important tradition is that we do not change the rules without the support of others. That seems to me beyond just tradition. It is just basic common sense because, lo and behold, governments change from time to time. The powers that a current Liberal government wishes for itself, because they are Liberals, they are benevolent, they are nice guys and would never abuse these powers, and that is not true, transfer to the next government, whichever one Canadians choose that to be. Then Liberals will be saying that the government is abusing its power now. They then will have to ask themselves, as Liberals, who gave it those extraordinary powers, and maybe the Liberals should have thought twice about that.

Looking at changing fundamental ways in which we dialogue on behalf of Canadians, in which we fight on behalf of Canadians, does not belong to the Liberal government. The money does not belong to the Liberal government; it belongs to all Canadians when they pass budgets. The laws do not belong to the Liberals government; they belong to all Canadians when we pass new laws.

The role and representation we have in this place, as my friend from the Conservatives says, sometimes hangs by a thread. The ability for people to have faith and trust in what we do and to continue to participate in our civic conversation relies on the quality of the effort we bring to this place, the respect we have for each other, and the respect we have for Parliament. This does not break down to right versus left. This comes to down to what is right and what is wrong. The Liberals I have spoken to quietly, as we have gone around this place, are sometimes scratching their heads, wondering what they are doing as a Liberal government. They are wondering why a massively long filibuster is taking place at procedure and House affairs. They are wondering why we doing this and why we are we doing that.

This is pattern language. However, patterns can change. It seems to be difficult to put this pattern change onto the current government. We need to talk to Canadians about this. We need to talk to Liberal colleagues about this, and to the people who support them. This is not what they voted for. They hoped for something a lot better. They expect and deserve a lot better. We need to reverse this pattern of trying to impose will on Canada's Parliament. It only belongs to the Canadian people.

● (1640)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned right and wrong. This is day seven. We have been discussing this for seven days in the House and essentially we have agreement. I know on the Liberal side all Liberal caucus members agree and I think all members in the House agree that unfettered access for MPs is extremely important.

Second, we all agree that this matter is to go to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That is the normal procedure. Everybody is in agreement with that, because we know this is an important matter. As has been mentioned, this is not the first time this has happened. We need to hear witnesses and look at this in more depth so we can come up with solutions to make our best effort to correct this situation so that MPs have access to this place.

In light of that, we have spent seven days on something that we all agree on. We are all in agreement. Some members have even said every MP should have the opportunity to speak, which, in effect, would be five and a half weeks of speaking about something that we all agree on, but right now the reality is seven days. We are talking about something that we all agree on. Is that right? Is that a respectful use of the House's time? Is that a respectful use of taxpayers' dollars? They are paying our salaries to be here. We are all in agreement on something and all we are trying to do is send it to PROC. We have spent seven days on this and opposition members are upset because they think we should spend more days on something we all agree with that has the same end result.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am only smiling a little, because that speech could have been given by Conservatives in the last Parliament when we in the opposition were trying to hold up some of their worst agenda.

The history of this is important. The member would do well to remember that her own government tried to kill this motion by punting it into non-existence. She can wave away, but it was only the intervention of the Speaker which overruled the Liberals' attempt to kill this motion in the first place that allowed us to talk about it at all. She can be as sanctimonious as she likes about respecting taxpayers.

Respect? My goodness, the Speaker of the House of Commons had to intervene with the Liberal government and say, "Whoa. Access to Parliament is incredibly important." The Liberal Party tried to kill that motion in Parliament because it was interfering with the Liberals' machinations at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

What is going on there? Let us talk about respect. The Liberals are trying to ram their changes to Parliament through without all-party agreement. If they want to stop the filibuster, if they want to stop the mess that is going on in the House, they should respect the traditions of Parliament, which prime ministers Pierre Trudeau, Chrétien, Mulroney, even Harper, respected. The Liberals came in saying that they were going to do better than even Stephen Harper. They should at least abide by that tradition.

If we are going to change the rules of the House, we have to do it together, because it is just too easy to break that tradition and then have majority governments force their will on Parliament. That is exactly what the Liberal Party is trying to do while it pretends that they are discussion papers and open conversations, and yet the Liberals will never at any point agree to one simple principle: that when we change this place, we should only do it together. That is a good principle that should be respected.

● (1645)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader stated numerous times today that the opposition is being irresponsible in wanting to continue debate on the question of privilege. I want to get the member's comments on that.

Privilege

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it is such a remarkable moment to hear the Liberals talk about taking too much time to respect Parliament. That is a bit of a contradiction of things as Liberals are going through the process of disrespecting Parliament, as Liberals are going through the process of saying they want to change the rules that guide all parliamentary debates, that they want to change the rules by forcing bills to only have a certain amount of time for debate at their discretion and nobody else's, to not even have a vote on it, and that it should be built into all legislation so that they can curtail Parliament and shut down discussions so there will be less scrutiny over what it is they are doing. They want to be able to stand and say that omnibus bills are bad in a campaign and the Prime Minister says that he will not use them, which, by the way, is a quote, and then the government introduces an omnibus bill that does exactly what the Prime Minister said he would not do.

Governments need to be held to account. Governments from time to time, as shocking as this might be for some of my Liberal colleagues to hear, need to be corrected and their power needs to be checked. The last I checked, in the last election, less than 40% of voting Canadians voted for that party. That means there is a majority of Canadians who did not. That means their voices need to be heard and their opinions need to be respected. That is the job of the opposition and that is what we will continue to do, despite these trickieries by the government.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are keeping the democratic reform dream alive. He has done exceptional work.

We are here today to talk about unfettered access to the House for voting and also how the House operates.

I want to go back to the orientation session that we all had about 18 months ago, when 200 of us were new members of Parliament. I was so excited in that orientation by the conversations I had with new members of Parliament from every party. We all said the same thing: that we were all here to work together collaboratively to make a better Canada. That is why we were here.

During that orientation session, the Prime Minister made a cameo appearance and said that the role of the opposition is to make government better. I wrote that down, being a new member sitting in opposition. However, in order for that to happen, government has to listen to some of the things that the opposition has to offer.

Then I took my seat in the House, as did all members. There are probably very few things as special as the first time we take our seats in the House and look around this building and think about the history that was made here, the traditions that came from the House, the fact that this is the home of democracy for Canada, the House of democracy, and that we need to set a shining example for how democracy is supposed to work for the rest of Canada. Certainly that was the expectation of the 107,589 constituents from Kootenay—Columbia who sent me here. It was to build Canada and to build democracy.

Therefore, it is somewhat unfortunate that we end up having to talk about unfettered access to Parliament and the lack of democracy that appears to be becoming more and more evident in the House.

Quite frankly, in terms of access to Parliament, the debate should continue until all members are heard and debate collapses, rather than ending through the imposition of closure, which we are facing today.

What happened? I will go back to the situation that came up on March 22, 2017. The MPs from Milton and Beauce were prevented from getting to Centre Block to vote on the budget—which is a very important vote—because the RCMP stopped parliamentary buses from picking them up in order to allow an empty Prime Minister's motorcade to leave the Hill.

After the vote, the MP for Milton got up on a question of privilege, and the Speaker later ruled that indeed her privileges had been breached. Debate began immediately on the question of privilege. Not too long after that the Liberals, in a move deemed unprecedented by the Speaker, used their majority to shut down debate. The Conservatives then got up on another question of privilege to argue that the Liberal move denied the MP for Milton the opportunity to have her question of privilege properly heard. The Speaker ruled in their favour, which of course leads to where we are today.

We are keeping this debate going because we oppose what happened to the member and also oppose what is becoming a very heavy-handed approach by the Liberal government to changing the Standing Orders. Now they have given notice of closure on this current question of privilege, which highlights yet again an undemocratic approach to dealing with accountability in Parliament.

I find this quite disappointing, but it is not my first disappointment in my 18 months here in the House. Motion No. 6 was introduced around May 17 of last year. It was almost a year ago today that we were dealing with Motion No. 6, which was brought forward by the Liberal government and attempted to set in place a temporary set of Standing Orders to control what the House was going to be doing for at least the next two months. It proposed that the House would not have an adjournment time on Monday to Thursday, when debates would continue; that there would be no automatic adjournment for summer; that only the government could move motions to adjourn the House or have debates; and that there would be no need to consult with the opposition about when to adjourn for summer. The government could do it at any time.

● (1650)

This ended up being withdrawn by the Liberal government after what was a really dark day, quite frankly, here in the life of this Parliament, and after the Prime Minister apologized and the Liberal government withdrew Motion No. 6.

Privilege

Democratic reform was another disappointment. I really felt betrayed when it came to democratic reform. I went around my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, I visited 14 communities, and I started every discussion this way: we are not here to discuss if democratic reform is coming; we are here to talk about the preferred approach to democratic reform and proportional representation. Every discussion I started was that this was not a discussion of if we were moving to democratic reform or proportional representation; it was how we were going to get there. I and hundreds of thousands of Canadians were really disappointed to see democratic reform, which was one of the primary focuses of the Liberal campaign, all of a sudden disappear almost overnight.

With Bill C-7, the RCMP are looking to have a collective voice across Canada. Bill C-7 came through the House over a year ago. It went to the Senate and came back to the Liberal government in June 2016, and we have heard nothing since then. The RCMP still does not have a national voice, which they very much need, to deal with a number of issues they have.

The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security recently decided it was not going to deal with Bill C-51. In my riding of Kootenay—Columbia that was one of the major election issues in 2015, and it contributed to my riding for the first time in 21 years no longer having a Conservative member of Parliament. That is how important this issue was. There were rallies held across my riding opposed to Bill C-51, and nothing has happened with that so far.

Yesterday we saw what many who have spent much longer in Parliament than I considered a real disrespect to the leader of the NDP, who asked questions that were not answered by the Prime Minister, even though the Prime Minister was here in the room. That is a lack of respect for our leader.

For the past few weeks, I have sat here and heard the Liberals claim that they just wanted to have a discussion on how Parliament works, and now they are unilaterally forcing through changes. These changes will not make Parliament better and do not have the unanimous consent of the House, which is tradition. It is really quite fair that Canadians are asking whether these are being imposed just to make life better for Liberals and the Prime Minister, and if not, then why not negotiate and get consensus from all parties in the House in terms of how we are going to work here in the House on behalf of our constituents? Any time a government becomes less accountable, it is the citizens who suffer.

We are here in Canada's house of democracy, and I go back to where I started in terms of the orientation session when everyone I talked to from every party said they were here to work together collaboratively to make a better Canada in what truly should be a shining example for democracy. It has been quite disappointing to sit through the last seven days and see what has happened here in the House.

I truly believe the Liberal government needs to do better going forward. We need to respect democracy. We need to work together collaboratively here in the House. I look forward hopefully to seeing that happen.

● (1655)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, as the member and all members of the House will know, this issue is all about unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. It is not the first time this has happened. In fact, it has happened a few times.

I sat on PROC on a couple of occasions and had to deal with the issue. We all understand and appreciate PROC is where the issue is best dealt with. The last time it was dealt with in the House was on May 12, 2015. The total number of speakers was five, representing the parties. They stood in their place and explained why it was so important that PROC deal with the issue.

As of right now when the member sat down, we have had 49 members speak to this issue. A number of members said that they were speaking because it is a filibuster on a privilege issue. What are the options? If we were not debating this issue, we would actually be debating the national budget and the budget implementation bill.

Does the member believe his constituents would rather we were debating the budget, the priorities of government, and the priorities of opposition parties, or would they rather we continue what can easily be justified, from my perspective, as an opposition filibuster on an issue that should in fact be dealt with by PROC?

We in the Liberal caucus have made it very clear that we want the issue to go to PROC. We want to ensure that every member of this House has unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, the real question Canadians have is how we got to this point in the House, and how the Liberals put us in this situation where we are sitting today.

The Liberals put us in this situation by shutting down debate prior to sending the issue to PROC. You tried to shut down debate last time prior to sending it to PROC, and the Speaker overruled what you wanted to do. Now we are facing that same situation, where once again you are shutting down debate on a really important question of unfettered access to Parliament.

That is the real question Canadians want an answer to. Why has the Liberal government put this House in that position?

● (1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind the hon. member that the tradition is we speak through the Chair. I am sure I had nothing to do with that, so I am sure he meant the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it was the last comment from my friend from Kootenay—Columbia that talked about how we got here.

Canadians will wonder, and the government will hold itself up and ask why there is such discord, having this almost oblivious attitude toward its own actions in getting us here.

If the government wants to see the House functioning well and if it wants to see committees functioning well, it should ask itself how it is unable to do that with the majority that it has been given by Canadians. The simple request from the opposition is that in order to change the rules that conduct us here in Parliament, we should respect the long-held tradition that all parties agree to those rule changes, so that the power and balance of power that goes on between opposition and government is maintained with some dignity.

Ultimately, is that not at the heart of the problem, and why so many things have fallen off the rails, and why the government seems incapable of actually passing legislation? This is probably one of the lightest legislative agendas we have seen in 50 years. It is incredible how little the government has been able to get done, outside of selfies, of course, because it does a lot of those.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, again I go back to the fact that I came here, as did all members, at least initially, to work together collaboratively to make a better Canada here in what should be a shining example for democracy.

We have strayed way off track from that over the last little while. We need to get back to working together collaboratively. We need to get back to making sure that this House is a shining example for democracy in Canada. That means that before the government changes the rules in the House, it is done collaboratively and through consensus. That is how we move democracy forward.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith. I am sure she will do an excellent job, as usual.

I am honoured, and perhaps a little saddened, to rise in the House to speak to the privilege motion currently before us. I say it saddens me a little because it is unfortunate that we have to move privilege motions and hold a debate on this matter, rather than doing our usual, ongoing work. Nevertheless, this is a very important matter, and I will come back to it in more detail later.

I think this question raises a much broader issue, that is, our ability to do our work in general. It is important because we are all here to represent our constituents and all Canadians. It is crucial that we be able to do so properly, because that is our most fundamental role.

One of the opposition's key roles is holding the government to account. Although we often hold it to account on budget issues, I feel we should hold it to account for all of its decisions. To do that, we need to be able to have in-depth debates and move about freely on the Hill so that we can take part in those debates.

During the election campaign, the Liberals said they wanted to work on creating a more collegial atmosphere and making it easier for us to do the job people elected us to do, but it really seems like things are going the other way and the Liberals are breaking their promises, just as they have done so many other times.

Privilege

We were promised sunny ways. We were told everything would be great and everyone would get along and work together. However, for the last little while, the government has been trying to change the system so it can get its hands on all the power. Initially, I thought its goal was to prevent the opposition from having a say, but that is not quite right. What the government is really trying to do is make it so that anything said in the House, any argument the opposition might make, is simply ignored or carries no real weight.

For example, the government wants to change the rules of the House. I have no problem with discussing the rules of the House. However, what we are seeing now and what we saw last year during the debate around Motion No. 6 is the government's desire to foist its own vision of how the House should work on us, and that vision involves more power for the government.

People keep saying there is going to be a conversation about this. I bet I am not the only member of the House who is starting to wonder if “conversation” is really the right word here.

● (1705)

As we get to know this government better, we realize that having a conversation means that it will talk, it will listen, it will allow us to talk, but at the end of the day it is still going to do whatever it wants. The government wonders why the House is dysfunctional at times. The answer seems obvious when we look at what the government did with Motion No. 6 and what it is trying to do yet again to limit our powers.

The government is not really leaving us the choice to rise or not rise on motions like this on a question of privilege. On behalf of the people we represent, we have to express our right and our privilege to truly be heard on these major issues.

I was talking about the word “conversation”, but another way of saying it is “keep talking”. In other words, we can talk all we want, but at the end of the day, the government is going to do what it wants. Electoral reform is another fine example. The government promised to have a conversation and listen to what Canadians had to say about electoral reform. The government formed a committee that travelled across the country. It was all very nice.

Almost 90% of the experts and Canadians who appeared before the committee were of the same opinion, agreeing that we should have a mixed member proportional system. The Liberals did not like it because, as we know, it would not necessarily give them the advantage. Suddenly, the conversation came to an abrupt end. The Liberals said that they had let the people speak, but now they would do what they wanted and break a promise that they repeated many times.

This has happened in connection with several issues. There is the matter of House procedure. They are trying to limit the powers of the parliamentary budget officer. How will limiting these powers help transparency and accountability? They are also using closure. On this issue of privilege, it is quite interesting, given that our colleagues from Milton and Beauce were unable to vote because they did not have access to the House.

Privilege

When members raised this question of privilege, the Liberals' reaction was to use their majority to prevent the matter from being debated. Even the Speaker said that it was unprecedented, that a government had never before used its majority to prevent a debate on a question of privilege.

In the end, they changed their minds, so we could discuss it here today, but now here we go again. The Liberals are imposing a gag order on this matter. In this context, we have to wonder what happened to all the lofty promises to be more collegial and work together. All this is coming from a government that promised transparency and openness.

Everyone here today saw question period, for instance. So much for transparency and openness, when the Minister of National Defence speaks out of both sides of his mouth and the Prime Minister does not really answer any questions. I think that is why more and more people are saying that, in the end, the Prime Minister and his government are just like the Harper government, but with a grin. We are happy to see a smile, but we would like to see a little more in terms of fundamental changes.

I would like to say a quick word about one of my memories of Jack Layton, from our first caucus meeting. We are not supposed to discuss caucus outside of caucus. He spoke to us at length about respect. That is what this is about, respect for members and for our institutions. I think that is what everyone here today is asking for.

● (1710)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. We agree on one thing: the question of privilege is a very serious matter and we must investigate it thoroughly.

Over the past few months, I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We have had the opportunity at that committee to study questions of privilege. This is the seventh day that we are debating this question in the House of Commons.

Does my colleague not think that it would be better to study this question of privilege at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs instead of in the House of Commons? We could finally make progress on bills and things that affect Canadians every day.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

This question of privilege, which is on something as fundamental as physical access to the House, is a question that affects us all, each and every one of us. The question truly needs to be debated somewhere other than in a committee. It needs to be debated in the House.

We must not lose sight of the context in which we are discussing this question of privilege. We are discussing it in what I consider a context of repeated attacks against our institution, the institution that is the house of all citizens, the institution that represents those citizens. The government is trying to change our rules and various problems have been raised. It is a question that is debated in a much broader context and it is important that all members are able to take part in this discussion.

● (1715)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time understanding why the Liberals have been asking us all day why we do not just send this to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as quickly as possible. Now, it is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance who is asking us that question. Earlier, it was the member for Winnipeg North. We are in this situation because the Liberals refused to do just that when this issue was raised in the House the first time. The question of privilege was simply swept under the rug. The Liberals killed it. They did not want to hear about it. At that time, some Liberal members even gave speeches about why the matter did not need to be sent to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That is why they killed the debate. I am therefore wondering why they are asking us this question today. We are in this situation because they refused to send this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when it was first raised.

I do not understand the Liberals' definition of filibustering. Members are in the House to debate issues. Why should members who want to speak be prevented from doing so? That is not what I would call filibustering. Members rise on behalf of their constituents and speak in the House. Whether there are 39 or 49 members, they are rising because they want to speak and share their opinions on this issue.

Does the member agree with the definition of filibustering used by the Liberals, who believe that if many members want to speak about an issue, this automatically constitutes filibustering and we are trying to delay the whole process?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with what my colleague just said. The government side seems to be saying that talking about this prevents us from doing our job. It is really the opposite. We are talking about the fundamentals that allow us to do our job. The rights and privileges of parliamentarians are not perks. They underpin this institution, they are the foundation of our democracy, and they allow us to represent the people who elected us.

Therefore, this is a very fundamental issue, and I completely agree with my colleague. This is so fundamental and such an important part of our work that all members who wish to speak should be allowed to do so.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin this debate by reading from one of our national newspapers some words of Chantal Hébert:

[The Prime Minister] does not much like the House of Commons and the feeling is mutual...[The Prime Minister] rarely engages with the opposition in a meaningful way. For the most part he speaks past his critics' arguments. The attentive hearing he affords those who challenge him in town halls does not extend to opposition parliamentarians. When not on his feet, [the Prime Minister] can be the picture of adolescent boredom....All of which brings one to the wide-ranging House reforms the Liberals have recently brought forward under the guise of what they call a discussion paper.

For the four opposition parties the proposals add up to a heavy-handed bid to erode their already limited capacity to hold a majority government to account.

Privilege

This resonated with me and it resonated with my very Liberal father, who was embarrassed to see a journalist he admired speaking in such a way of the party he used to support.

The reason we are in this debate today is that on March 22, two members of Parliament were blocked from accessing the House of Commons by the Prime Minister's motorcade. That is quite an emblem, the privilege of being in the Prime Minister's limousine blocking those of use who come to work using the parliamentary public transit. These members of Parliament were unable to fulfill their principal role as parliamentarians, which was to come to the House to represent their constituents in a vote of this Parliament.

When the member for Milton raised this question of privilege in the House, the government made the decision to end debate, to shut it down, and the Speaker of the House ruled this decision to be "unprecedented". The Speaker of the House ruled that no other government, Liberal or Conservative, had gone so far as to end debate in this fashion on a reasonable question of privilege.

The actions of the government members on March 22 to me speak volumes about their level of disrespect for members of Parliament and for the work we do in Parliament. By shutting down debate in the way they did, the government acted in blatant disregard for the way some members were treated, that they were prevented from getting here by the physical transportation logistics outside, and that then the government did not want to debate the fact that they were unable to do the very thing they were elected to do in the House.

The government's so-called modernization of the House has proved to be much more of a power consolidation process, drastically reducing the resources available to the opposition to hold it to account. I am very much reminded of the Prime Minister's invitation and welcome to new parliamentarians, and 215 of us in the House are new parliamentarians. My colleague, the member of Parliament for Kootenay—Columbia, reminded us of that invitation, that reminder from the Prime Minister to new parliamentarians that the opposition's job was to hold the government to account. For the government to now have tried, I believe, three times to remove those tools from the opposition is in stark contrast to the Prime Minister's sunny ways message to us just a year and a half ago.

I am afraid these government actions set precedent, whether they are refusing to allow debate on a question of privilege or whether the government is unilaterally pushing through changes to the Standing Orders, thereby changing the very process for establishing these rules. This long-standing convention of securing all-party approval before overhauling the Standing Orders of the House of Commons must be preserved. That all-party consensus is the tradition that includes Harper and Chrétien.

Consensus is something we have talked about quite a bit in the House on other matters, and it is confusing for all of us. The government says that consensus is not needed to change the House rules, although that has been the parliamentary tradition. The government says, though, that consensus was needed in order to change the voting system, although the promise the Liberals made to Canadians was to make every vote count, which in every case is interpreted as proportional representation, if we follow Fair Vote and some of the other NGOs that have been holding this light up for so long to bring democratic reform to Canadians.

● (1720)

There was nothing in the Liberal platform that said we needed a consensus of parliamentarians. This was a solemn promise, repeated more than 1,000 times, apparently, by the Prime Minister to change the voting system. However, once he got here and did not like the way the committee recommendation was going and the consensus of Canadians, he said we needed consensus in this House.

We do not need consensus to change the Standing Rules of the House, but we did need consensus to change the voting system.

Then consensus was, again, not needed when it came to approving the Kinder Morgan pipeline and its associated oil tanker traffic. The government's campaign platform was that the pipeline approval would not be forced through without revamping and redoing the regulatory process that had been so undermined by the Harper Conservative government. That was a solemn promise again, with hand on heart, that they would change the regulatory review process before pushing through the pipeline, but then, in the end, consensus was not needed, although we will find virtually every coastal community, especially around the hub of transportation, having opposed the pipeline; municipal government bodies like the Union of BC Municipalities, and a significant number of first nations opposed the pipeline approval, particularly in my area, coastal British Columbia, where our \$8-billion maritime marine industry is threatened by the potential of an oil spill.

Again, no consensus was needed there, and that very much feels like a broken promise, I must say.

Women rely on public transit, such as buses, to get to and from work. If they do not have access to that public transit, their employment is put in jeopardy. Not only that, but tragedies like the Highway of Tears show that women's safety is put at risk when they do not have access to proper transportation. We are hearing about this right now at the status of women committee. Jane Stinson, who is a research associate with the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, said:

If you think about it, it's particularly people who have lower incomes who use public transit, because they can't afford their own cars. Women have lower incomes, so it's not surprising...

[Public transportation] is a big issue, for some of the reasons that you mentioned....

...the absence of public transit in northern communities is a major problem. It puts women at risk, as you mentioned. The Highway of Tears is perhaps the most shocking example, but I'm sure it's not alone; it's just better known. In lots of cases in the north women have to hitchhike, as do others, to get around.

In urban locations, our research in Ottawa showed that it was very serious. It was accessibility, and that meant cost—the cost was too high for people—and also lack of schedules, and sometimes where the routes went.

Again, there's a responsibility with the federal government, even in local transportation. It's a question of transfers.

We also heard testimony from United Steelworkers. Meg Gingrich said:

Private Members' Business

We call on the government to invest in social infrastructure, such as affordable housing and public transportation, and...for procurement provisions and policies that meet gender and equity standards with clear enforcement mechanisms and that do not simply continue occupational segregation.

I am hearing this in my own riding, as well. Lack of public transit, again and again, is a barrier to women accepting jobs and being able to carry out their responsibilities.

Disappointments about implementation of such promises are epitomized by the government's current approach. Sunny ways and hope and hard work seem to be election promises that have now been abandoned. We have had time allocation imposed in the midst of very emotional, vital debates, such as physician-assisted dying. Three times, I was ready to give my speech, trying to convey constituent concerns. Three times, I was unable to deliver it. I never could stand to debate that vital issue for Canada because of time allocation imposed by the government. Motion No. 6 last year seemed designed to neuter the opposition, and so did the so-called discussion paper that we have been debating these last few weeks.

Again, it is so out of step with the promise of the present government. I ask the government, in every way, to return to being co-operative, collegial, recognizing it can use its majority, recognizing the opposition has a job to do as well.

● (1725)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, consultations among parties have taken place, and if you seek it I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to the Question of Privilege (denial of access of Members to the Parliamentary Precinct raised on March 22, 2017), at 5:30 p.m. today or when no member rises to speak, the questions on the sub-amendment and the amendment be deemed adopted and the question on the motion as amended be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business on Wednesday, May 3, 2017.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the length of the debate that we have had with regard to this issue. We have now had 10 times as many people speak on the issue of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct, which is a record number, given the topic. I am glad to see that it looks as if it is coming to an end, because we want to get on to other matters, such as the budget debate, and I understand a private member's hour will be coming up shortly.

I will leave an open-ended question for the member across the way in regard to how important it is that both the opposition and the

government recognize PROC and wish it well in trying to resolve the issue of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

● (1730)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I share the optimism of the member opposite about PROC being able to do its work. While I have the floor, I will remind the member that while in opposition he said:

The government, by once again relying on a time allocation motion to get its agenda passed, speaks of incompetence. It speaks of a genuine lack of respect for parliamentary procedure and ultimately for Canadians.

I would urge the member and his government to cease using time allocation to stifle debate in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the privilege motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, May 3, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

THE GOOD SAMARITAN DRUG OVERDOSE ACT

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.) moved the second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-224, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (assistance in overdose drugs) be now read a second time and concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand before you today to speak to Bill C-224, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act.

[Translation]

Last month, I had the pleasure of sitting in the Senate gallery during report stage and third reading stage. The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs amended the bill in committee in order to correct the errors and omissions in the original version of my bill. The amendments to Bill C-224 are in line with my objectives and my intent in drafting the bill, and they clarify certain points.

They provide greater certainty for people who call 911 in the event of an overdose.

[English]

I have to thank the Senate for not only accepting my bill but, frankly, for making it better. They tightened up the language to ensure that a person who is being given assistance would not be charged, nor would anyone accompanying them be charged. That is the intent. As long as they are giving assistance they cannot be charged or convicted for possession.

Private Members' Business

Another Senate clarification makes it clear that both those who remain at the scene of the drug overdose and those who accompany the victim to seek medical assistance are also protected. Again, the Senate reinforced the language to ensure that the person suffering from an overdose is equally protected from prosecution.

If someone is suffering an overdose, or a friend comes to help, they may already be under some other court order for possession charges. The bill as amended by the Senate makes it clear this would not be held against them.

This was sober second thought in action. Senators have demonstrated once again that their collective scope and depth of knowledge really does make better law. I am grateful to Senator Larry Campbell for sponsoring the bill and to senators Murray Sinclair and Vern White for their amendments, which reflect their expertise in judicial proceedings and law enforcement.

In Senator Campbell's speech at third reading in the other place, he talked about the lives that have been lost in our home province. At the time he introduced the bill, he stated that 600 British Columbians lost their lives to drug overdoses, and by the end of 2016, 914 had died that year alone. We share the same hope that when this bill becomes law, this number will start to decline.

The scourge of overdose deaths is increasing across Canada, from coast to coast to coast, and the number of overdose deaths is rising. The bill will not fix the entire opioid problem. It only addresses one small piece of the puzzle. We all know that.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

All members of the House and senators also know that to fight opioids in Canada, we, the legislators, must act quickly. That is why in its report the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs asked that the two chambers study Bill C-224 as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, here we are debating Bill C-224 today, because it was moved up in the order of precedence just one month after the Senate report.

[*English*]

I urge all my colleagues here in the House to come together today. Let us pass Bill C-224. We can send an important message to all Canadians that together we can start saving lives through a very simple action, by telling Canadians it is okay to call for help.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I was in the House when the bill was introduced.

[*English*]

I was in this chamber for my brother, and I should not say his name of course, but we share the same last name, less one letter. I think I speak for all of us on this side, and hopefully for all of us in the chamber, in saying that this is a brilliant example of public policy being brought forward by a member of this House that will have an immediate impact on the lives of people in, sadly, unhappy

situations. We all recognize the great emotion and strength that the member has brought to this, and we extend our congratulations.

Let me conclude by saying, after having gone through this process, I think the member is the first to have achieved a bill out and back from the other place. Could he perhaps share with members of the House some lessons on legislating?

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, it is very important for the success of the bill that we work proactively and collegially with all members of the House on both sides of the aisle. All members who spoke to the bill in past, and hopefully as time comes, spoke in favour of it. This is likewise in the Senate as well. In the other place, all senators wanted to help. They all recognized the value of the bill. The key factor is to keep it simple, keep it narrow, and work with everyone to get it done.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in strong support of Bill C-224, the good Samaritan drug overdose act, as amended by the Senate and introduced by the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam.

I want to first commend the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, whom I have the privilege of serving on the justice committee with, for his leadership and stewardship in raising this important issue and moving this important legislation forward. Without more, Bill C-224 is a good bill, a needed bill, and a bill that would save lives. It could not be more timely. It could not be more timely, because Canada faces an opioid overdose crisis. It is a crisis that has claimed the lives of thousands of Canadians. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbours, colleagues are gone, taken. It is a crisis that has torn apart families and devastated communities. It is a crisis that is not slowing down.

The opioid crisis is particularly acute in my home province of Alberta. In 2016, Alberta emergency responders responded to some 2,267 fentanyl-related events and 343 Albertans died from a fentanyl overdose. That is up from 257 in 2015 and way up from the two dozen who died in 2012. Even more concerning is that we are seeing more and more potent opioids, such as powdered fentanyl, being pushed out onto our streets. Powdered fentanyl is 80 times more potent than morphine. The percentage of deaths in which fentanyl has been detected has increased from 5% in 2012, to 30% in 2015, to a staggering 62% in 2016.

The vast majority of drug overdoses occur in the presence of at least one other person and yet, far too often, individuals who witness a drug overdose do not do the right thing. They do not pick up the phone. They do not call 911 to get help. One may ask why someone would not call for help. The simple answer is that far too often they are afraid. They are afraid of being charged with a criminal offence. They are afraid of being caught up in the criminal justice system, so they do not call. They do not act, and the consequences of inaction can be fatal.

Private Members' Business

The Standing Committee on Health, which I know my colleague, the hon. member for Calgary Confederation, serves on, studied Bill C-224. As well, the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs heard powerful testimony from Christine Padaric, the mother of the late Austin Padaric. Austin was a promising high school student. One night he went to a party and made a choice that a lot of high school students make: he took drugs. He reacted and Austin's friends did not call for help. They did not call 911. They thought they could handle it on their own. Perhaps they, in part, were worried about the police arriving, maybe charges being laid, and maybe being caught up in the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, they were not able to handle it and as a result, Austin died at the age of 17.

• (1740)

Sadly, Austin is not alone. There are many Austins out there, and there will be many more Austins if action is not taken. That is precisely what Bill C-224 seeks to do. It is to prevent future Austins by providing immunity from prosecution for individuals who witness a drug overdose, do the right thing, call for help, and as a result of doing the right thing, are found to be in possession of illicit drugs.

It is important to note that Bill C-224 applies, in terms of immunity from prosecution, to only simple possession. It would not apply to other offences, such as impaired driving or drug trafficking. Moreover, it would only apply to offences listed in schedules I to III of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act: in other words, street drugs. What Bill C-224 would not do is provide immunity to drug pushers, drug dealers, and drug traffickers who are pushing dangerous and illegal drugs onto the streets that are killing thousands of Canadians each and every year.

Bill C-224 is legislation that makes sense. It went to the Senate and was amended in the Senate. I have to say that the Senate did a good job of improving Bill C-224, as the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam pointed out. There were amendments from the other place that would extend immunity from prosecution to breaches of release orders arising from simple possession. Those amendments make sense. They are consistent with the spirit and objective of Bill C-224. In that regard, I would submit that it does not make sense that a good Samaritan should be immune from prosecution on the basis of simple possession but then be charged for breaching a release order arising from the very same simple possession. That would be self-defeating.

While the good Samaritan drug overdose act is new to Canada, it is not a new concept. Indeed, some 37 states, plus the District of Columbia, have similar legislation on their books, and the legislation that has been passed in the U.S. is having the intended effect. More and more people are calling 911, and as a result, more and more lives are being saved.

I urge the speedy passage of Bill C-224 as amended. This legislation is needed. It is needed now. It is needed to save lives.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking and congratulating my colleague from Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam. As the member for Gatineau pointed

out earlier, I too was in the House for the first hour of debate on this bill. I heard his very moving testimony.

People sometimes forget that the issues our constituents bring to us and our political parties' positions are not the only things that motivate us in our work. Sometimes, we are motivated by very personal stories.

That is why it is so gratifying to see a member do so much to improve legislation about such an urgent public health issue. This is something we can all support, and the NDP is very pleased to do so.

I know there is no place for jokes in a conversation about such an important issue, but we also want to thank the Senate for its work. That is not something the NDP says a lot. I think these amendments are reasonable and improve the bill. We can continue to support the bill with these amendments, and we hope this matter will be acted upon quickly. This is something we have been waiting for for a long time.

We just heard from the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford from British Columbia, who has been working hard on this file, as well as the member from Alberta. People often think that this is an issue that concerns western Canada, and it is, as proven by the thousands of deaths that have occurred since the beginning of this public health crisis, that is, the opioid crisis. However, this crisis is making its way east. We recently began seeing cases in Ontario and Quebec. That is why it is important that we all work together to pass the necessary legislation to save lives.

We are talking about Bill C-224, the good Samaritan bill. As my Conservative colleague just clearly illustrated, people might wonder why anyone would not seek help when someone they are with, often a friend, has overdosed, whether in the context of a party or any other situation.

Obviously, the legal consequences may dissuade people from seeking help. Unfortunately, all too often, young people are the ones who suffer the consequences of substance abuse and the associated legal ramifications. It is therefore essential that we put in place a legislative framework to ensure that people are not afraid to ask for help. That is the least we can do.

The Senate proposed some very important amendments to clarify and improve this bill. The Senate changed some of the wording so that the bill provides clear explanations of the measures to protect against possession charges, which is the intent of the bill. We want to make sure that it is clear that anyone who is with the victim of an overdose, often a friend, and who calls 911 to get help for the victim will not suffer the legal consequences that would normally apply.

As part of its amendments, the Senate also proposed that overdose victims and those at the scene when help arrives be protected from being charged with an offence concerning a violation of pre-trial release, probation order, conditional sentence, or parole.

These are offences that do not pose a direct threat to the public, as my Conservative colleague pointed out earlier. For example, this type of exemption would not apply in a case of impaired driving. The types of violations targeted are those likely to be committed by a person who is at the scene of an overdose or who could, him or herself, be a victim requesting help. That is very important.

• (1750)

I want to come back to the question I raised earlier, because it often comes up during discussions on substance abuse or the use of certain illegal substances.

Unfortunately, there is a stigma attached. Consider the example of the debate surrounding the opioid crisis and safe injection sites. Whether we like it or not, there is a link between that and the bill currently before us. The question remains, and political courage is needed. That is why we are happy to see that the House supports this bill and the efforts made by our colleague, the bill's sponsor.

There is a misguided idea out there that we support illegal activities and encourage people's addictions. On the contrary, we want to tackle a public health problem. We want people who have health problems and who cannot find the support they need to get help. That is what we hope this bill achieves.

This is very important if we want to be able to address the crisis we are facing at this time. Indeed, as I have said, this often has an impact on young people. Even in the context of the debate on the legalization of marijuana, there is often talk of the importance of prevention, education and all of those issues. It is all very well and good to talk about the money that would be invested and to engage in prevention or educate people on the subject, but if there is no legislative framework to assure us that people will be able to get help, whether it be through the good Samaritan bill or safe injection sites, all of that is futile. It is very important to ensure that all the efforts made by the government or by Parliament via the various proposed bills are closely linked.

I will provide a few figures on the opioid crisis in British Columbia. I think it is important to share these statistics in order to illustrate the extent to which this is a public health issue. I am saying this as the NDP public safety critic. This is no longer a public safety issue, but rather an issue related to people's health. In my view, it is the reason why we have to start studying evidence-based policies. On this subject, I recognize the efforts that are contained in this sort of bill.

I must acknowledge that, although we see this in the news, we do not necessarily see it in my riding, in our own backyard. For the people listening to us, I think it is important to demonstrate the extent to which this is a health-related crisis.

There was a record number of deaths in British Columbia in December. The number reported was 142. That was up from the previous monthly peak in November 2016, which was 128. That is enormous. In December, as the holidays were approaching, 142 families lost a loved one because we did not act fast enough. I believe that no one in the House, whatever their political allegiance, wants to continue in this direction and have this reality on our collective conscience. This is an unacceptable number of deaths.

Private Members' Business

In Vancouver, every week between 9 and 15 fatal overdoses are reported. It is scary and completely unacceptable. If we can support bills like this one and efforts like this, which will give us a legal framework to provide people with the help they are looking for, then we can transition into the government making further efforts. We would be prepared to support the right kind of progressive, fact-based efforts because that would help address this urgent health crisis and eradicate this scourge. I think that this is our collective responsibility.

Again, I want to thank my colleague from Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam. I want to reiterate how inspiring it is to see such incredible efforts being made for such a personal story. I also want to thank the Senate for its work to improve the bill. We hope that this is just the first step. We have to move forward and put an end to this public health crisis once and for all.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to support private member's bill, Bill C-224, the good Samaritan drug overdose act, including the amendments made in the Senate. These amendments bring further clarity to the bill and they expand the circumstances where immunity would be provided to increase the likelihood that bystanders would seek emergency help during an overdose, expanding the opportunities for the bill to save lives.

Simply put, the bill would help to address the systemic barriers that would prevent many Canadians from seeking help from first responders during an overdose. Their fear is that they may be charged and convicted of drug possession once first responders arrive.

I want to take this opportunity to commend my colleague, the member of Parliament for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, for bringing this important bill forward and for proposing a simple legislative change that would help save lives. His work on the bill is an honour to him, the House, and to the people he represents.

As everyone in the House knows, we are in a crisis situation. Opioid related overdose deaths in Canada have increased at an alarming rate and we must continue to act to save lives.

In British Columbia alone, there were over 900 overdose deaths in 2016, and so far the rate of death from drug overdoses in 2017 sadly shows no sign of decreasing. There were 102 overdose deaths in B. C. in February of this year. This is an average of 3.6 deaths a day for that month. These are not just abstract numbers. Each one represents a Canadian who has lost his or her life in a way that is preventable.

Most overdoses occur in the presence of others and, like many other emergencies, a person's chances of surviving an overdose depends on how quickly he or she receives medical attention. Calls to 911 during an overdose are typically either not made or may be delayed to such an extent that the victim can suffer irreparable brain damage or other harms.

Private Members' Business

A 2014 report from Ontario found that only half of those surveyed said they would call 911 in the event of an overdose and wait at the scene for emergency personnel to arrive. This is consistent with international research where studies have found 911 call rates for overdose events to be as low as 15%.

At a recent forum discussion on the future of drug policy, the Minister of Health pointed out that as one part of responding to the opioid crisis, we needed to call out stigma and reduce the discrimination associated with drug use.

The high rates of drug overdose deaths we are seeing in the country and the low rate at which Canadians are willing to contact emergency services when they witness an overdose are unacceptable and clearly point to an issue that is being made worse by stigma and fear, the impacts of which must be addressed before we lose more lives.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada is supporting the response to this crisis through the new Canadian drugs and substances strategy, a comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate, and evidenced-based approach. The strategy is built on four pillars—prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and law enforcement—and will also serve to improve the evidence base.

The good Samaritan drug overdose act is in keeping with our government's approach to drug policy. The elimination of drug possession charges for people seeking help for an overdose is a harm reduction measure that strikes a balance between public health and public safety. What is more, the implementation of this bill will provide the opportunity for law enforcement officers to strengthen their relationship of trust with drug users, a relationship that could put drug users in a safer environment and give them better access to treatment when they are ready to seek it.

As originally written, Bill C-224 guaranteed anyone experiencing or witnessing an overdose immunity from minor drug possession charges if that person contacted emergency services or law enforcement for help.

[*English*]

The Senate has made several amendments to the bill. Most of these amendments are meant to bring further clarity to the legal text so it can be more easily interpreted by law enforcement and the courts.

I will not spend too much time on these amendments except to say that the government supports them and that they certainly strengthen the Bill. For example, the proposed amendments make it clear that the law will protect those who call and leave the scene as well as those who arrive at the scene after the call has been made. In addition, the amendments clarify that witnesses to an overdose, as well as the person who has overdosed, will be provided with immunity under this proposed law.

The more substantive amendment proposed by the Senate would expand the immunity provided by Bill C-224 to include protection from charges for offences concerning a violation of a pre-trial

release, probation order, conditional sentence, or parole relating to simple possession.

I understand that this broadened scope of the immunity provided under this good Samaritan bill may cause some of the members of this House to reconsider their support for this bill. However, we are in a crisis situation where preventable deaths are occurring daily. I urge all members of this House to maintain their support for this important piece of legislation.

The Government of Canada would not be the first to provide such immunity. In fact, 15 states in the U.S. have a good Samaritan drug overdose law that provides immunity from charges of possession as well as protections from probation or parole violations.

There is a simple reason why the Senate has proposed these amendments and why these 15 U.S. states have covered such violations under their good Samaritan laws. It is because fear of being charged for the possession of a controlled substance is only one reason why people are afraid to seek help during an overdose.

The Ontario report I mentioned earlier also looked at reasons why people were afraid to call for help during an overdose. The two most common barriers to calling 911 during an overdose event were fear of arrest, and being on parole. Of those respondents on probation or parole, only 37% indicated they would call emergency services and wait for help to arrive if they witnessed an overdose.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Extending the immunity guaranteed by Bill C-224 would increase the number of situations that could be a matter of life or death. However, this would not prevent law enforcement officers to focus on public safety and security efforts concerning the most serious offences, especially if officers were to discover the production or trafficking of controlled substances when they were called to the scene of a crime.

As many people have pointed out, fighting the current opioid crisis will not be an easy task. Passing the good Samaritan bill will not fix the whole problem, but it can be part of the solution and it is a big step in the right direction. I hope that all members of the House will join me in supporting this important bill.

I would again like to thank the member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam for his dedication and hard work. I am very proud to serve with him.

[*English*]

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I want to express to you my thanks for so many dedicated women and men, in the House administration and at the library, for their incredible work. Without them, Bill C-224 would not have achieved the success it has had up until now.

In particular, I want to thank Marc-Olivier Girard at the private members' business office, Isabelle D'Souza and Wendy Gordon at the office of the law clerk, and Michael Dewing at the Library of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:08 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2:00 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:08 p.m.)

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