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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC'S INTERESTS

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, shortly before the first referendum, on May 14, 1980, at the Centre Paul-Sauvé, the Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, made this statement:

> ...we, the Québec MPs, are laying ourselves on the line, because we are telling Quebeckers to vote NO and telling you in the other provinces that we will not agree to your interpreting a NO vote as an indication that everything is fine...we are willing to lay our seats in the House on the line...

What was the outcome? Quebec had a constitution shoved down its throat. We still have not signed it. Thirty-seven years later, things are still not fine.

Quebec is trapped in a straitjacket that is preventing us from spreading our wings. Ottawa is still trying to get us to fall in line. From one empty promise to the next, today's Liberal Party is the same as the old party, and its 40 phantom members are still not standing up for our interests, just like in the old days.

Je me souviens. I remember.

* * *

MONTREAL

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise today to mark the 375th anniversary of my hometown, Montreal.

Montreal is the epitome of unity in diversity. From Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue to Rivière-des-Prairies, Montreal is home to many peoples from all sorts of backgrounds and cultures.

A world-class city full of joie de vivre, it hosts the Formula One, the jazz festival, and Just for Laughs. Montreal is also synonymous with the Canadiens, who have won the Stanley Cup 24 times, as well as heroes like Jean Béliveau and Maurice “Rocket” Richard.

No matter where you are in the city, whether at Saint Joseph's Oratory on Mount Royal or in Old Montreal, rich in history, art, and gastronomy, there is no better place than Montreal.

Let us pay this warm and welcoming city the tribute it deserves. I invite Canadians from across the country to join me in marking the 375th anniversary of this magical place.

* * *

● (1405)

[*English*]

HEMOCHROMATOSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand in the House and recognize May as Hemochromatosis Awareness Month.

For those who do not know, hemochromatosis causes the body to absorb too much iron from foods eaten. This excess iron is then stored in people's organs, which can lead to life-threatening conditions, such as liver disease, heart problems, and diabetes. An estimated one in 300 Canadians are affected with this disorder, meaning that approximately 80,000 Canadians have type 1 hemochromatosis.

The Canadian Hemochromatosis Society is a small but energetic charity, with very limited resources, that punches well above its weight in raising awareness about this important disorder. However, it needs all of our help in raising awareness.

I encourage all my colleagues to let their constituents know about hemochromatosis and its warning signs by sharing the link www.toomuchiron.ca on their Facebook page and to attend a reception hosted by the CHS tonight from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

We could make a huge difference in someone's life.

Statements by Members

MAY DAY FESTIVAL

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Port Coquitlam celebrated its annual May Day festival.

The festival kicked off at the beginning of the week with maypole dancing, followed by terrific music by Port Coquitlam's own Chersea.

The rain finally stopped on Saturday morning, just as the Rotary May Day parade began. I walked alongside many esteemed members of our community. This year's parade marshal was former city councillor Mike Thompson.

May Day would not be complete without a royal party. This year Ava Dickson from Castle Park Elementary School was May Queen.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Harvey, from the École des Pionniers-de-Maillardville, was our ambassador.

[*English*]

After the parade, the community enjoyed the day at the Leigh Square block party, and the weekend was capped off with a Mother's Day picnic in Lions Park.

I thank all the volunteers and community groups that work to keep Port Coquitlam vibrant, inclusive and fun.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND BIPHOBIA

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 13th annual International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. This day started in Montreal as an urgent call for an end to the discrimination, hatred and violence that still face the LGBTQ community. It has since grown as well to become a day of celebration of sexual and gender diversity.

Anti-LGBTQ violence is still all often a reality both at home and abroad. Recent events like the ongoing campaign of persecution against gay men in Chechnya and the epidemic of murders of transgender women in El Salvador, 17 so far this year, should be cause for action.

Unfortunately, this day also marks another anniversary, another year of the Senate failing to pass legislation guaranteeing transgender Canadians the same rights and protections the rest of us already enjoy. Once again, the current Senate hearings on Bill C-16 have had the ugly side effects of providing a public platform for transphobia.

Members of the Senate need to respect the will of the elected House, which first passed this legislation six years ago and twice since, and get the job done before they rise for the summer. Otherwise they risk killing this bill again.

CANCER

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every hour, one young Canadian between the ages of 15 and 39 is diagnosed with cancer.

A lost generation, young adults with cancer have the lowest survival improvement rate, the lowest participation in clinical trials, no national research agenda, and a lack of specific community resources. To address these needs, Geoff Eaton, himself a two-time cancer survivor, founded Young Adult Cancer Canada, or YACC, as it is affectionately known in the year 2000.

Its signature event, “Shave for the Brave”, is happening in communities throughout Canada, and I am honoured to support YACC with my second shave at the Brave Brunch event happening in St. John's on May 28.

Each young adult with cancer has a unique story, a story of courage, of dreams deferred and of perseverance. These young adults need our support. Please rise and join me in thanking Young Adult Cancer Canada for all its does to support cancer survivors.

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● (1410)

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small businesses are essential to my riding of Richmond Centre.

With Vancouver International Airport, YVR, as Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific, I am proud of the work our entrepreneurs are doing to promote tourism and hospitality while creating-jobs in Richmond and throughout the Lower Mainland. By supporting the tourism industry, we are showcasing the best this country has to offer to the many visitors who pass through YVR.

I also look forward to co-hosting a special round table with my colleague from Banff—Airdrie to further hear from these groups and work with them to address the challenges they face. Together, we can ensure that tourism, as well as the small businesses that depend on it, continues to flourish in the years to come.

It is my privilege to serve a riding that welcomes so many visitors. Richmond continues to be a significant contributor to the tourism and hospitality industry.

* * *

[*Translation*]

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge is home to many talented, intelligent, and dedicated young people, and each and every one of them has an important voice. The youth council in my riding firmly believes that all Canadians, regardless of age, deserve to be at the table, and that includes young people.

[*English*]

I continue to be impressed by the passion and dedication this team of young adults has demonstrated in every group discussion, including taking action to address an issue of great importance to it: youth mental health.

The CYC is organizing a youth mental health town hall for our community. I am proud the CYC is working hard to address an issue that cannot be ignored.

I encourage everyone to attend this youth-led discussion on youth mental health, May 26, at 7 p.m., at the Maple Ridge seniors centre. Please visit my website or call my constituency office to RSVP. We can no longer remain silent on this issue.

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CYSTIC FIBROSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize May as Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month and to commend Cystic Fibrosis Canada for the incredible work it continues to do.

Beginning in 1960, this internationally recognized leader in funding and innovation has a storied history, both in Canada and abroad. In its 67 year history, Cystic Fibrosis Canada has contributed enormously to the understanding, identification and treatment of this disease. As well, tens of thousands of volunteers have given their time and energy to finding a cure and ending a disease that impacts thousands of Canadian children, young adults, and families.

It is with this, as my colleagues and I return home this coming week, that I highlight the 28th of May and the Walk to Make Cystic Fibrosis History taking place in communities across Canada. I invite all Canadians to recognize this important day, this important month, and this important cause for which something can and must be done.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, municipal leaders in my riding are raising alarms on the impacts of the Liberal carbon tax.

The mayor of Woodlands County, Jim Rennie, states, "Not only do our county taxpayers have to pay the tax on their homes and vehicles, they also must pay it on county graders and to heat municipal service offices."

The mayor of Whitecourt, Maryann Chichak, states, "The unfortunate and troubling reality is that the cost of this tax to municipalities throughout Alberta will ultimately be passed on to families and households who will already be paying for this cost directly as well."

Mackenzie County councillor Josh Knelsen says, "The carbon tax is having a huge negative impact. People who live in the far north do not have the luxury of a quick trip to the doctor. It is 800 kilometres away to see a specialist. Even our community halls must pay more for heat and power."

I know Liberalnomics 101 is tax, tax, tax, but why should community halls have to hold even more bake sales just to cover the disastrous Liberal carbon tax?

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have a large community of multi-generational veterans in my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

The recent reopening of the Thunder Bay veterans affairs office has had a real positive impact on the veterans in my community. I have heard from several local vets that the staff have been doing a fantastic job assisting them access the services they desperately need, and for this I would like to extend my thanks.

Recently, I held a veterans round table that initiated positive discussion on ways our community and the federal government can help vets transition back into civilian life, and better include those who serve from all walks of life.

We want to ensure that the people who dedicate their lives to protecting Canadians never fall through the cracks and are never forgotten.

Our government and my team are committed to working to support those who have served bravely, and I look forward to continuing these positive discussions with my amazing veteran community.

* * *

● (1415)

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former academic, I can attest to the importance of organizations that advocate for the advancement of post-secondary education, promote innovative research, and ensure student success. I am pleased to highlight the Council of Ontario Universities and welcome it to Parliament Hill today.

The work of researchers at Ontario's post-secondary institutions allows government, business, and community leaders to make evidence-based decisions. That is why our government is committed to significant investments that improve education in Canada.

Ontario universities are economic drivers. The largest in the province contributes $15.7 billion to the economy annually. The university experience helps students gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to excel in the most demanding of jobs.

Whether it is Western, Algoma, Brock, Guelph, Carleton, Lakehead, Laurentian, McMaster, Nipissing, OCAD, UOIT, Ottawa, Queen's, Ryerson, Toronto, Trent, Waterloo, Laurier, Windsor, York or RMC, Ontario's post-secondary education system is extraordinary and should be celebrated.

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming the Council of Ontario Universities that has come to Parliament Hill today to raise awareness about the value of federally funded research in Canada.

Everyone in Canada benefits from a strong post-secondary education system. University researchers offer creative solutions to real life situations and issues. They produce authoritative analysis, fresh ideas, and indispensable knowledge that could not come from any other source.

Today, researchers from universities across Ontario will host their annual Research Matters reception in collaboration with our Speaker. The reception will feature research projects in the area of clean technology, advanced manufacturing, infrastructure, and transportation.

I would encourage all members to join me following question period in the Speaker's lounge for the Council of Ontario Universities research matters reception.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, a day in which we take a stand against discrimination faced by the LGBTQ2 community around the world.

Progress continues, but too many people still live in fear of hatred and violence because of who they love, or how they express their gender.

[*Translation*]

Today we join all Canadians in condemning homophobia and transphobia. No one in our country should live in fear or face violence or discrimination.

A Montreal organization, Fondation Émergence, created International Day Against Homophobia in 2003. Their leadership is what inspired the movement to create the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

[*English*]

I salute the leadership of Fondation Émergence and other organizations serving the LGBTQ community. I thank each of them for their ongoing work in the promotion of diversity and inclusion. It does not matter just what we do today, but every day that makes the difference.

[*Translation*]

JEANNE MANCE

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, history often forgets the accomplishments of women. Today, on the 375th anniversary of the City of Montreal, there is one woman in particular that I want to honour for her role in the founding of this wonderful city. I am talking about Jeanne Mance.

On May 17, 1642, Jeanne Mance and Paul de Chomedey arrived on the shores of the Lachine Rapids and built Fort Ville-Marie, which would become Montreal. In addition to providing stewardship of the colony and managing supplies, this young French woman also founded and administered a hospital that treated the French and indigenous peoples alike. The hospital was funded by another woman, Madame de Bullion. The Hôtel-Dieu remains one of the largest hospitals in Montreal. Jeanne Mance managed to revive the colony on more than one occasion.

Today I want to wish all Montrealers a happy anniversary and I tip my hat to Jeanne Mance, co-founder of the city and a key figure in its history and survival.

* * *

● (1420)

[*English*]

ORGAN DONATIONS

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians, including my son, are alive today because of the generosity of an organ donor. There is nothing that can make one appreciate the selflessness of Canadians more than such a gift of life.

About 4,500 Canadians are waiting for a life-saving transplant, but sadly, more than 200 die each year before a match is found, deaths that could be prevented if there were more registered donors. I encourage everyone to sign up as an organ donor, and give the gift of life.

This Saturday, in Edmonton's Emily Murphy Park, the Canadian Transplant Association will host the Transplant Trot. Thanks to the dedication of local volunteers, participants will run or walk three, five, or 10 kilometres in support of an organ donation. I encourage everyone to donate generously to this important cause and help save some lives.

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[*Translation*]

MONTREAL

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 17, 1642, a handful of men and women decided to found a city that never ceases to amaze us, a city that is constantly reinventing itself, a city that shines throughout the world. On May 17, 1642, these men and women founded Montreal.

[*English*]

Over time, Montreal has become a commercial hub, and a gateway to Canada's immense territory.

[*Translation*]

Today, Montreal remains a haven to people from all over. It is a city that is open to the world, where everyone can thrive, excel, and flourish. Montreal is a city to be proud of with its festivals, music, and cinema, the Old Port, the mountain, and the Plateau.

Montreal is a city steeped in history, but also a city of tomorrow. It is a city where differences are respected and people lend a hand. Montreal is a city full of people who are curious, who want to learn more and push boundaries. I am proud of my city.

[*English*]

I love my city.

[*Translation*]

Happy anniversary, Montreal.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

ETHICS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's story, when it comes to his stay on billionaire island, keeps changing. It now turns out that billionaire island is not even owned by the Aga Khan. The sad fact is that the Prime Minister would likely have known he was breaking the ethics rule before he went on the trip. With security arrangements and the fact that PCO has to travel with him everywhere he goes, trips like this do not just happen on the spur of the moment.

Will the Prime Minister tell us whether or not the Privy Council warned him in advance that the trip would violate the law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said time and time again, the Prime Minister will answer any questions asked of him by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

As the member has stated so eloquently, it is important that the Prime Minister travels with the resources he needs, so that whether on personal or business travel, he is able to carry out his official duties. We will continue to do the good work we are here to do on behalf of Canadians.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer is exactly the reason why the Prime Minister's decision to put the Liberal House leader in charge of choosing the next ethics commissioner, the person who is going to be responsible for investigating Liberal corruption, is such a bad idea. This is the same House leader who stands up day after day to defend the Prime Minister's lack of accountability, while he sits beside her.

Does the Prime Minister actually believe the Liberal House leader is the right person to choose the next ethics commissioner?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is this government that is putting forward an open, transparent, merit-based appointment process, which actually allows all Canadians to apply. I encourage them to apply, because all positions are available online.

More importantly, we know that the work the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner does is important. We will always work with her, or whoever is in that post.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know the fix is already in with regard to the appointment of the next ethics commissioner.

The Liberals' so-called merit-based process is actually a process to determine the level of support for the Liberal Party. People who donate to the Liberal Party, or who are a former Liberal cabinet minister get to go to the top of the list for appointments. That is exactly how the Official Languages Commissioner was chosen.

Which Liberal is at the top of the list to be the next ethics commissioner? Is it Anne McLennan, is it Dalton McGuinty, or maybe it is Kathleen Wynne?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that diversity is our strength. The mandate letter is in both official languages, which are central to our history and to who we are. They are a priority for us.

After a long, open, merit-based process, Ms. Meilleur stood out as the candidate best qualified for this position. For over 30 years, Ms. Meilleur fought for francophones' right to services. She fought to protect Montfort Hospital and to ensure French-language health care services—

● (1425)

The Speaker: Order, please. the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone in the francophonie recognizes that she was the best Liberal available for the job.

On another topic, we know that Bill C-44 is an omnibus bill that goes against the Liberals' campaign promises. This bill also provides for the creation of the infrastructure bank. The bill has not even been passed and the government is already in the process of appointing the chair of this bank.

Does the Prime Minister realize that not only is he breaking his election promises, but, more importantly, that he is flouting Parliament's authority?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure bank is an important part of our ambitious plan to build and rebuild Canadian community infrastructure. We are investing more than $186 billion to support our municipal sector, our provincial and territorial sectors, and to build the infrastructure they need.

As far as the appointments are concerned, we will make sure that once the bank is established, the appointments will be confirmed after that.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you want to build something strong, you shall respect the authority of the House.

[*Translation*]

That is the problem with this government. It believes that it can do whatever it wants, not just with the infrastructure bank, but also with Investment Canada. Yesterday, a minister said in a parliamentary committee that the government was in the process of choosing a new president for this other government organization, which has not been approved yet because Bill C-4 has not yet been passed by this Parliament.

Once again, can the Prime Minister explain why he is flouting Parliament's authority?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for giving me the opportunity to talk about the Invest in Canada agency. That is exactly what we need to attract investments here in Canada. This agency will provide concierge services and attract investments that may be made in the riding of my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent.

All of Canada's municipalities and provinces applaud the creation of this agency. What we want to do in 2017 is to attract investments to Canada because we know that economic growth creates good jobs for Canadians across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, so much for Prime Minister's question period.

The Liberals refused to allow a parliamentary investigation into the sweetheart deal between the Canada Revenue Agency and KPMG, but that was not the end of the sketchy story. A member of the Liberal-appointed panel looking into tax evasion attended an event sponsored by, guess who, KPMG. This was on top of appointing someone from KPMG as treasurer of the Liberal Party. How does the revenue minister explain this mess?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, cracking down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance is a priority for our government. We invested a historic $444 million, which has allowed us, in the first year alone, to carry out more audits, hire an additional 100 auditors, and recover $13 billion, including $1.3 billion through the voluntary disclosures program. That is just the beginning. With the additional amounts allocated in this year's budget, our second budget, we will recover even more money for Canadians next year.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another member of that same panel accused seven ministers of not understanding the principles of independence at all, and I think she was right.

When the Canada Revenue Agency let KPMG off the hook for its tax evasion scheme, what did the Liberals do? They appointed a director from KPMG to be the treasurer for the Liberal Party of Canada.

What will it take for the Liberal government to admit that it is clearly in a conflict of interest?

I want an answer that has to do with KPMG this time, not the talking points we keep hearing.

● (1430)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I just said because my colleague just does not get it.

Cracking down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance is a priority for our government. My job is to produce results. With more auditors and more audits, we recovered an extra $13 billion last year. That is what I call results. We will invest in services for Canadians. That is what we promised, and that is exactly what we are doing.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals could not care less about their conflicts of interest. That is what you call arrogance.

The Prime Minister just appointed a Liberal minister to the position of Commissioner of Official Languages. Mrs. Meilleur said, "I thought I could contribute as a senator, but the Prime Minister made it clear that he did not want any politicians in the upper chamber."

Why does the Prime Minister think partisanship is inappropriate in the Senate but perfectly fine in the commissioner's office?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our two official languages are at the heart of our history and of who we are. They are a priority for us. We went through a long, open, transparent, merit-based process. Mrs. Meilleur was clearly the best candidate for the position. She defended the French language for over 30 years. She fought for the Montfort Hospital. She fought to ensure that Franco-Ontarians can get service in French in their province. She is the best person for the job.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Cash for access, accepting private gifts, using private aircraft, co-writing legislation with corporations, appointing a member of a firm immediately after blocking an investigation into that firm—the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

With all these conflicts of interest, it is more important than ever that we have an independent ethics commissioner. The Liberal government House leader stands every day to defend her boss's ethical scandals. How can she have any credibility to choose the next person to investigate her boss? Will she recuse herself?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am guessing that the member has not heard my previous answers, so I will remind him that just as we committed to Canadians, we have introduced a new, open, transparent, and merit-based appointments process to ensure that the diversity of our country is reflected, to ensure that the two languages of our country are considered, and to ensure that we are making better decisions when it comes to gender parity. The member knows that we have opened this process to have all positions available online. All Canadians can apply. I have full confidence that the Canadian who is chosen to fill the post will take the responsibility very seriously.

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ETHICS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when he is not designing government programs to help his billionaire friends, he is vacationing and spending taxpayer dollars like he is a billionaire himself. We all know that his taxpayer-funded billionaire-island vacation has landed him in hot water with the Ethics Commissioner, but what we have learned is that he has been misleading Canadians about who owns that very island, so here is a simple question for the Prime Minister. Who owns the island he used tax dollars to vacation on?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that the purpose and intentions of the opposition are very different from the purpose and intentions of this government. This government was elected by Canadians. This government was—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It is a little noisy this early in question period. We need some order so we can hear the answers. The hon. government House leader has the floor.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government was elected to represent middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join the middle class. That is why we lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians by raising taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians. That is why we are giving more money to families with children that need it the most. Our approach is to respond to the very real challenges Canadians are facing. The approach of the previous government was really to make patronage appointments, which we will not do. That is why we have an open and transparent—

● (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Speaking of the 1%, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's spokesperson now claims that he had no idea that his friend did not own this billionaire island, but now there is new evidence surfacing that seems to make his claim implausible. We now know that the Prime Minister's officials used taxpayer dollars to reimburse hospitality expenses for one staff, who was staying on the island with the Prime Minister, to Lexthree Ltd. Did the Prime Minister believe that his friend had changed his name to Lexthree Ltd., or did he know all along that he was staying on an island that was owned by a bunch of shell companies?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government was elected to represent the very real challenges Canadians are facing. Those are the very people we will continue working hard for. One of the first things we did after taking office was to ask the Clerk of the Privy Council to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Canadians expect better than the kind of noise I am hearing today. Let us settle down and listen. We have to hear the answers as well as the questions, or it will be a shorter question period.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that members are in this place wanting to do important work but do not want to listen to the answer. That is why the tone of this place, the conversation we have, actually matters.

One of the first things we did when taking office was to ask the Clerk of the Privy Council to develop guidelines surrounding reimbursement for travel by sitting Prime Ministers, their families, and guests. Prior to our taking office, no such guidelines existed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, the Prime Minister accepted an invitation from the Aga Khan to visit his private island. Then, we learned that the island in question does not in fact belong to the Aga Khan but to four companies that have been linked to tax evasion.

Given this blatant conflict of interest and all of the questions that have been raised about this over the past few months, is the Prime Minister still happy about his choice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said many times, he is happy to answer any questions the Ethics Commissioner may have for him. We are here to address the real challenges facing Canadians. We will continue to work for all Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gets harder to believe the Prime Minister's story about his trip to billionaire island every day. We now know billionaire island is held by a corporate entity with a murky ownership scheme. Not only is the island not owned by his long-time family friend, but the private helicopter was not either.

Did the Ethics Commissioner ask the Prime Minister who owned the island? If she did, what story did he give her?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said time and time again, the Prime Minister will answer any and all questions the commissioner of ethics has.

What is important to know is that our government is committed to responding to the very real challenges Canadians are facing. That is why we have lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. That is why we are giving more money to families with children that need it the most. That is why we are making strategic investments in infrastructure, working better with provinces, territories, and municipalities.

We know we can do better, and we will continue to improve the conditions and create the conditions for growth for Canadians and our economy to benefit.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the warm Caribbean waters, pirates used to throw their secrets overboard, believing they would sink to the bottom of the sea, never to be found again. Some secrets are now bubbling to the surface.

Billionaire island is not owned by the Prime Minister's long-time friend but rather by a labyrinth of shell companies that try to hide assets or avoid taxes. Even the ownership of the private helicopter in question appears to be murky.

Since it is Wednesday, I would like to ask the Prime Minister: What other secrets has the Prime Minister thrown overboard about his $200,000 taxpayer-funded vacation?

● (1440)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is working extremely hard to crack down on tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance in order to ensure that the tax system is fair and equitable for all Canadians.

Last year, we created an independent panel made up of highly respected professionals who volunteered to help improve the tax system. This panel of volunteers, honest people of integrity, submitted a report that will help us to strengthen our tax rules.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great answer. Meanwhile, questions keep going unanswered, while Canadians grow tired of the scripted talking points parroted by the Liberals. They may think their performance is like finding a hidden treasure, but no one is buying what they are saying, and the lip-synching act is giving the Liberals as much credibility as Milli Vanilli.

It being Wednesday, I am glad to have the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister: What other buried secrets is the Prime Minister hiding from the Ethics Commissioner?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of our government, which has made cracking down on tax evasion and tax avoidance a priority.

If my colleague opposite needs tangible results, he need look no further than the $13 billion that we recovered last year, including $1.3 billion through the voluntary disclosures program. That, for me, is a tangible result. We have done a lot better than the previous government, which was never able to accomplish what we have.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. I am hearing a lot of noise from some members, including the hon. member for York—Simcoe and some around him. Perhaps they could try to restrain themselves and show respect for this institution.

The hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, respect is shown through real answers.

As with most banks, the goal of the Liberal infrastructure bank is not about helping hard-working Canadians but about increasing profits for wealthy investors.

Yesterday the NDP moved a motion to invite some of those large investors to committee because they helped develop the scheme and they stand to profit millions from it. Guess what happened? The Liberals on the committee shut it down, so we are never going to hear from them.

My question is simple. Why are the Liberals so scared of hearing how their bank will help their—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the entire last year, we engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, municipalities, provinces, territories, labour unions, trade councils, the IMF, the World Bank, private investors, and our own pension funds, which invest in other countries. We want to make sure they invest here, in our own country, to create jobs here for the middle class, to create prosperity here in Canada, to make sure that we build infrastructure our communities need. What is wrong with that? The NDP might have an issue with that. We do not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that with the Liberals' new infrastructure privatization bank, Canadians will be the ones who end up paying for bridges and roads through user fees.

That much is certain, there is no other option. How are the private investors supposed to make a profit unless tolls and user fees are levied all over the place? Since the private sector will decide which projects are selected, of course it will choose the ones that are most profitable, not the ones that meet the needs of Canadians.

Are the Liberals not ashamed of imposing new fees and an additional financial burden on families that are already struggling?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian pension funds like the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board, the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement Fund, the Caisse de dépôt, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation are credible organizations that invest in places like Latin America and Australia. We want to make sure that they invest in our own country to create jobs here in our own country so that the middle class can grow and those people working hard to be part of the middle class have the opportunity for employment, communities that need infrastructure have the infrastructure to reduce traffic gridlock, and—

● (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is Wednesday, so can the Prime Minister please clear this up?

The finance minister claims that the Liberals' so-called infrastructure bank will be independent, but if the minister read his own legislation, he would see clearly that it is exactly the opposite. The Minister of Finance will approve loan guarantees. The Liberal cabinet will appoint boards of directors and the chairperson. The Liberal cabinet will have the final approval over the CEO.

Which is it? Is the bank going to be independent, or will the bank continue to be just an arm of the PMO, cabinet, and the finance minister to reward their Liberal friends?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after consultation with Canadians from wide experience and backgrounds, we have been able to create the right balance. We will make sure that the bank is an independent arm's-length crown corporation that is able to make decisions on its own but at the same time will be accountable to this House, to the people's House, to Parliament. As well, we will make sure that we are there to protect the public interest, that we are there to ensure that private bank funds are in the public interest and are needed to meet the needs of Canadian communities.

That is our goal. That is exactly what we are doing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the Liberal version of Robin Hood. This is the story of the Minister of Finance who invites his rich billionaire friends to pick the pockets of poor Canadian taxpayers.

Here is the recipe: borrow billions of dollars, to be paid for by future generations of young Canadians; take those billions of dollars and give them all to your rich Liberal friends, while promising them risk-free returns; call it the "Robinbank" of infrastructure.

When will the "Robinbank" stop taking money from middle-class Canadians and giving it away to rich Liberals?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pension funds that I talked about are where Canadians are investing for their retirement. That is the money we want to use to build the infrastructure that our Canadian communities need. I really do not understand why the member of the opposition is so much against organizations like Caisse de dépôt, which a very credible organization, or CPPIB, the teachers fund, or IMCO. These are credible organizations that invest on behalf on Canadians, creating jobs in our own country to help us grow our own economy. What is wrong with that?

They may have issues with private investors investing. We do not, because we know—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, businesses accept that risk goes with making a profit. Risk is a real thing, but not for electricity company lobbyist and former Liberal cabinet minister Sergio Marchi, though, who told the transport committee yesterday that the infrastructure bank will de-risk his clients' electricity investments through loan guarantees from taxpayers.

Imagine: the risk disappears. Will taxpayers' money disappear along with it?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member that he is absolutely wrong. The bank will shift the risk to the private sector appropriate to the investment that it makes. Every deal will be structured in the public interest. We want to make sure the public interest is protected.

That is why we want to attract the right people for the CEO, the board members, and the board chair. We encourage everyone to apply so that we can have the right expertise to make sure that we structure our deals in such a way that they are in the public interest, that we build more infrastructure that our communities need—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these companies already invest billions of dollars in electricity infrastructure. According to J.P. Morgan, they expect, on average, 20% rates of return. Now they want taxpayers to take any losses.

The Liberals' paid lobbyist, Sergio Marchi, has lobbied the government 40 times on infrastructure. He represents the same crony capitalists that Kathleen Wynne has enriched by forcing Ontarians to pay through the nose for electricity.

Why is the Liberal government forcing taxpayers to backstop the profits of Liberal wealthy elites?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are engaging through our partners. One thing we have learned is that for the last decade the Conservative government underfunded infrastructure. We have a huge infrastructure deficit in our Canadian communities.

We are making historic investments of $186 billion over the next decade. Despite that, there still remains or will remain an infrastructure deficit. Our goal is to mobilize private capital to build the necessary infrastructure, to grow our economy, create jobs, and support our municipalities in helping—

● (1450)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over five years, New Democrats have been urging the federal government to remove the transphobic regulation governing air passenger screening. This regulation has nothing to do with safety. Rather, it subjects transgender Canadians to public humiliation in facing questions about their gender and obstructs their right to travel.

In 2012 the Liberals supported the NDP motion to repeal this regulation. In question period, the member for Papineau himself asked the Conservative government of the day to ditch the regulation. If he supported removing this discriminatory regulation then, why as Prime Minister has he taken absolutely no action?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to tell my colleague that we are looking at this issue at this very moment and we will have more to say in due course.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a year and a half ago. When he was an ordinary member, the Prime Minister said urgent action was needed to repeal the Conservative regulation that prohibits airlines from allowing a person to board a plane if their appearance does not match the gender on their identification.

After a year and a half in power, the Prime Minister has done nothing on this. The solution is simple; he does not even need to pass legislation. Will the Prime Minister commit today to repealing this discriminatory regulation, a direct affront to the trans community?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just indicated, we are looking into this situation at this very moment.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Canadian and proud Montrealer, this year is especially important to me. While we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada, today we are also celebrating the 375th anniversary of Montreal. Visitors from Canada and around the world will be coming here to celebrate our culture and our artists.

Can the Minister of Transport tell us how the Canadian government is supporting these initiatives in partnership with Canada 150?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for Bourassa for this question and for all the fine work he does to promote Montreal's arts and culture.

Indeed, this is a year of celebrations not just for Canada, but also for Montreal, which is celebrating its 375th anniversary. We are here for Montreal. We are supporting Montreal with an $18-million envelope. We are here to celebrate Montreal's artists and creators, who share their talents across Canada and other countries. Happy anniversary, Montreal.

* * *

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Natural Resources received a list of recommendations to modernize the National Energy Board. It is no surprise that those recommendations are another hit on Alberta. We know the Liberals want to phase out Alberta's oil sands and we know they want to abandon our energy sector. That ideology was clear in these recommendations that stated Albertans cannot be trusted to drive Canada's economic engine.

On Wednesday, will the Prime Minister ignore these recommendations and finally be a champion for Canada's energy sector, or will he continue the attack on Alberta by dismantling our economy?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House continue to be proud of and impressed with the contribution of Alberta to the Canadian economy, principally in the energy sector.

I was very happy to be in Alberta last week and, along with the provincial government and the private sector, to announce significant investments that will lower the carbon footprint within the oil sands. We know that Alberta has been an essential driver of the Canadian economy and will continue to be.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the latest attack in the Liberals' war against Alberta came from the Prime Minister. His panel recommended that the National Energy Board be moved from Calgary to Ottawa. This would move the NEB away from industry experts, engineers, environmental scientists, and technicians and toward lobbyists and politicians.

Does the Prime Minister really believe that career politicians in Ottawa can make better evidence-based decisions than experts who live on site in Calgary?

● (1455)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the hon. member to the House. I know that she will do a terrific job for her constituents, as she has started to do already today.

I want to assure her that the government is well aware of the contributions of Alberta and of Calgary as engines of growth within the energy sector. We know that this is not only a reflection on their past accomplishments, but utter confidence in what they will do in the future, not on behalf of Alberta alone but—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for unemployed energy workers, Liberal talk on approving pipelines is cheap. Not a single shovel has hit the ground to get a single kilometre of new pipeline built under the current government. Now the Liberal-appointed NEB review panel wants to make it even harder to get projects built by doubling review timelines and adding new layers of red tape. When we add the recommendations of the Canadian Environmental Review Panel, it will be next to impossible to get another major project built in this country ever again.

Are the Liberals making it harder to get job-creating energy projects built on purpose, or is it just a result of their gross incompetence?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows very well that the regulatory environment that he recommended and we inherited did not yield any pipeline construction to tidewater, not a single kilometre.

We think that we can do better and that the regulatory system in Canada can be improved. We have asked review panels to consult with Canadians. We will now go out and talk to Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and when we return some months from now, I am confident that the regulatory system will be much better than the one we inherited.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been doing a victory lap for months, trumpeting their pipeline approvals as though press releases issued in Ottawa will actually get projects built, but talk is cheap, and unemployed energy workers want to see shovels in the ground.

For a government so intent on chasing the fantasy of social licence, the Liberals have done precious little to cultivate it. The Prime Minister has gone to oil towns like Calgary and Houston to sell the merits of pipeline projects, but if he is truly committed to getting these energy projects built, will he finally have the courage to do the same in Burnaby and Vancouver?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we approved the Trans Mountain expansion because we understand that the diversification of markets for Canadian oil and gas is vital for the future of the Alberta energy economy, and I am sure that all members on the other side of the House would agree with that. We approved—

Mr. Blake Richards: Where's the one you rejected? Tell me about that.

Hon. Jim Carr: —the pipeline expansion, and that will create 15,000 jobs, mostly for Albertans but also for British Columbians. We believe it is part of the important strategy of creating jobs while respecting the environment—

Mr. Blake Richards: Where's the pipeline?

Hon. Jim Carr: —at the same time.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie has been persistently heckling. I would ask him to restrain himself.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[*Translation*]

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals made big promises about how they were going to fix the problems with the temporary foreign worker program. Unfortunately, the Auditor General's report, which was released yesterday, indicates that the government has failed to properly manage the program. It also clearly shows that the government has allowed the improper use and abuse of the program to continue. That is another broken promise.

When will the government keep its promise and fix the serious, ongoing problems with the temporary foreign worker program?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government wants to thank the Auditor General for his study. Certainly, as the member said, for the entirety of the last Parliament, both the Liberals and the NDP pushed the Conservatives to review this program on four different occasions.

I commend John McCallum for calling the Auditor General to put together this study. It identifies that a botched program under the Conservatives has been provided with some recommendations. We have been moving on these recommendations and will continue to work with industry, with labour, and with employers to make sure that Canadians are first on the job, last off—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister promised to fix the temporary foreign workers program, I guess that was a Liberal promise and not a real one. What about the platform commitment to overhaul Canada's broken refugee system? Massive backlogs, unfair treatment, and lack of resources are threatening the integrity of our system.

Was the promise to "deliver a safe, secure, and humane refugee system" a real promise or just another Liberal promise?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our government's commitment to welcoming those fleeing war, terror, and persecution.

There were several parts to the member's question. Our government committed to establishing a sound, fair, and compassionate asylum system. The board recently introduced new measures, including shorter, simpler hearings in order to make the process more efficient, productive, and fair. These measures do not compromise the program's integrity. The board also set up a working group to deal with the existing caseload, which will help eliminate the backlog of refugee claims inherited from the previous government.

[*English*]

HEALTH

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government funded a working group to establish a Canadian autism partnership. After two years of work, the Liberals rejected the request of the working group, the self-advocates advisory group, and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, which proposed a modest budget of $19 million over five years.

My question is simple, and since it is Wednesday, I wonder if the right hon. Prime Minister might like to answer. Will the Liberals reverse their decision and fund the Canadian autism partnership?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by acknowledging, along with all members in the House, that autism spectrum disorder is a cause of lifelong concerns for people who are affected by it, including their families. We are all recognizing the need to advance further opportunities for recognizing these disorders and providing treatment.

That is why we have put significant resources behind research. In fact, we have funded research in the order of $40 million over the last five years for autism spectrum disorder. We are continuing to work on surveillance. We are continuing to work with provinces and territories to provide the resources they need.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that sounds like a no to me, so I will try this again. The Canadian Autism Partnership Working Group, along with a team of amazing self-advocates and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, worked for almost two years on this. They are requesting $3.8 million per year, a dime per Canadian, a dime, to fund a partnership that will meaningfully improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

Will the Liberal government commit today to funding the Canadian autism partnership?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we speak about the matter of autism spectrum disorder, I want to acknowledge the tremendous work of the member. He is one of many stakeholders across this country who work very hard. One of the best ways that the federal government can support advancements in autism spectrum disorder is to support research, and we have done so in a significant way.

We have also supported the provinces and territories which bear the responsibility for the delivery of treatment services. I am also working alongside the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. She is about to develop accessibility legislation that will have a real impact on people who experience autism spectrum disorder. We will work with all partners to support—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a headline in today's *Globe and Mail* reads, "Bungled start to missing, murdered inquiry is insulting to Indigenous people".

Just yesterday, the Native Women's Association of Canada gave it a failing grade, and said that the intake process is cruel and unusual. The association has gone so far as to recommend that it be boycotted until the intake process is fixed.

The Prime Minister has said there is no relationship more important to him. This inquiry was a cornerstone of his campaign pledge. It is Wednesday, will he stand up and tell us what he is going to do to fix the mess?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

The terms of reference of the inquiry make clear that the families should and must be at the centre. I have read the letter from the families. They are making heartfelt suggestions and asking important questions.

I am looking forward to hearing the commission's response. I was pleased to see last evening when Waneek Horn-Miller responded to say that the commission can do better.

Our government has also taken immediate action on the root causes, with investments in women's shelters, housing, education, and reforms to the child welfare system.

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● (1505)

HEALTH

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are paying too much for prescription drugs. We have the second-highest per capita spending for pharmaceuticals in the OECD.

The government took quick action last year by joining the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance to leverage better prices with the collective buying power of the provinces and territories. It is saving taxpayers $700 million per year, but it is not enough.

Can the minister give the House an update on the steps she is taking to lower prescription drug prices in Canada?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Prime Minister asked me to work to make sure that prescription medications are accessible, affordable, and appropriately prescribed.

To that end, I was very pleased yesterday to announce consultations and a proposed suite of regulations for the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. This is the most significant suite of regulatory changes for this board in more than 20 years. It will have a real impact on the cost of prescription medications in this country. All Canadians will save money. I encourage people to participate in this discussion.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past year, the Prime Minister has refused to acknowledge his responsibility in the Phoenix fiasco.

The Prime Minister laid off 250 compensation experts between February and April 2016 as he was launching the Phoenix pay system. This means that the Liberals are responsible not only for launching the system on February 24, 2016, but also for cutting the number of experts, which has caused delays and compensation errors.

Will the Liberals stop deflecting blame and finally take responsibility?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they really have no shame.

The party opposite laid off 700 compensation advisers and, in order to post a false surplus, recorded $70 million in non-existent savings. They left us with a system that is a disgrace and that we have to spend a lot of money to fix so that it meets our expectations. That is what we are going to do. The other side of the House has no shame.

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LABELLING OF FOOD

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the Prime Minister, who said, "I am hearing consumers say loud and clear that they want to know more about what they are putting in their bodies.... We are working with them." That is exactly what he said on Radio-Canada when he was asked what he thought of the fact that 80% of the population supports mandatory GMO labelling, not to mention that the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party put forward a resolution about this during its 2016 convention. This evening, we will be voting on whether to honour the desire for transparency expressed repeatedly by the Prime Minister, his party, and the majority of Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister walk the talk and support my bill this evening?

[*English*]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that Canada has one of the safest food systems in the world. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I work along with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that.

We are a government that believes in science. If there is any need to indicate on the basis of an analysis of any particular food that there is a reason to put a label on it, we make sure that happens. We know that GMO products are safe. They are all tested in this country. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I are pleased to continue to make sure that is the case.

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NATIONAL PARKS

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Rouge national urban park is central to my riding, and with the passage of Bill C-18, the House of Commons is closer than ever to seeing it fully realized.

Could the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please give the House an update on the steps our government is taking to complete the Rouge national urban park?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park for his tireless advocacy on behalf of the Rouge national urban park.

The Minister of Transport and I have announced a significant step toward the completion of Rouge national urban park with the transfer of Transport Canada lands to Parks Canada. With this transfer, Parks Canada now owns and manages more than half of the lands identified for the land assembly as Canada's first national urban park nears completion.

Should Bill C-18 pass the Senate, ensuring the same protection for Rouge as there is for every other national park in Canada, I am confident we will be able to complete the park as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canada—

● (1510)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lakeland.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last month employees at the Vegreville case processing centre were given their options for when the Liberals close the office.

The minister and other Liberal MPs claim that the closure is to save money, but the employees in Vegreville consistently exceed departmental targets and outperform other offices. They unquestionably provide good value for taxpayers.

Since it is Wednesday, will the Prime Minister ask the minister to reverse his predecessor's mistake and keep these rural jobs in Vegreville?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware that this move will have an impact on employees and their families. We will continue to do everything we can to minimize that impact. People currently working at the centre will be able to keep their jobs at the new office, which will be about 100 kilometres away.

I myself have met with members of the community to discuss this matter. I understand that their concerns are real. We will keep the lines of communication open so that we can continue to discuss the Vegreville centre with them.

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board expert panel that reported this week included prominent industry people, such as Brenda Kenny of the Canadian Pipeline Association and Hélène Lauzon of the Quebec Business Council on the Environment. The report was damning.

This is an agency that has no credibility whatsoever, and needs to be massively overhauled. Coupled with the expert panel on environmental assessment, it is clear that the bogus process upon which Kinder Morgan was subjected to a sham of a review does not have any credibility.

Will the government reconsider approving a pipeline that should never have been approved?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that when we took office, there were a number of major infrastructure projects under review. We established a set of principles that would govern how they would be reviewed, and one of the important ones was that no proponent would be asked to go back to square one, which I am sure members of the House would agree is fair.

We knew and announced at the time that this would be an interim step leading to a longer term reform of environmental assessment in Canada, a reform and a process that is now well under way.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order with respect to the nomination of Madeleine Meilleur as an officer of Parliament, the Official Languages Commissioner, and in particular with respect to the motion the government has now put on notice to confirm her nomination.

As a matter of law, the Official Languages Commissioner can only be appointed if two statutory requirements are satisfied, as set out in section 49 of the enabling act, which states:

> The Governor in Council shall, by commission under the Great Seal, appoint a Commissioner of Official Languages for Canada after consultation with the leader of every recognized party in the Senate and House of Commons and approval of the appointment by resolution of the Senate and House of Commons.

Therefore, there must be consultation with leaders of the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party. Second, only after valid consultation has occurred, a resolution must be moved and passed in this place.

Canadian courts have made clear that when the use of the term "consultation" appears in a statute, it connotes much more than notification, yet notification was all that was offered in advance of this appointment announcement to the leader of the New Democratic Party and, I understand, to the leader of the Conservative Party.

Our leader was sent a letter that announced the nomination, and invited a reply within a few days. Having sent that reply, indicating our profound disagreement with the nomination, there has been no offer of further discussion from the government to resolve these concerns.

The courts have upheld, in the case of Lavigne, that the Official Languages Commissioner is appointed under a quasi constitutional statute. This is an officer of Parliament responsible to this place, and not to the government of the day.

Mr. Speaker, simply to provide information, as in the present case, does not constitute the statutory precondition of consultation. Therefore, in our submission, the motion to nominate Ms. Meilleur should not be voted upon until the statutory requirement of true consultation has occurred.

● (1515)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly weigh in on this important issue, and express the official opposition's disappointment in the process as well.

Subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act says:

> The Governor in Council shall, by commission under the Great Seal, appoint a Commissioner of Official Languages for Canada after consultation with the leader of every recognized party in the Senate and House of Commons and approval of the appointment by resolution of the Senate and House of Commons.

The Leader of the Opposition received a letter from the Prime Minister on May 8. The letter of consultation, that mockingly pretended to be in accordance with the aforementioned subsection of the Official Languages Act, stated that the Prime Minister was nominating Madeleine Meilleur as the next Commissioner of Official Languages.

That was the extent of the consultation process. The Leader of the Opposition wrote back to the Prime Minister stating her concerns about the name of the person proposed for the position. This individual served as a provincial Liberal cabinet minister for 13 years until June 2016.

We strongly believe that officers of Parliament must be beyond any reproach, and perception that they may be susceptible to political influence or partisan interests. With the Prime Minister first nomination for the position of an officer of Parliament, he proposed a partisan Liberal nominee, who has donated almost $5,000 to the Liberal Party of Canada, and who donated to a personal campaign for leader of the Liberal Party.

As you are very aware, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of vacancies to fill for other officers of Parliament. This is a very troubling precedent, and we are concerned that the Prime Minister will propose other partisan Liberals to fill these positions.

We would also like to point out that at the federal level, there are restrictions on interaction between former ministers and institutions for which they had interactions or responsibility. Under the Conflict of Interest Act, former federal ministers have a two-year cooling off period where they are restricted on any dealings with the institutions for which they were responsible.

We recognize that the act would not have a direct bearing on this situation, but it is inappropriate that a former Liberal partisan provincial minister of francophone affairs would be put in charge of an institution for which she would have significant dealings, less than one year after her resignation.

The official opposition does not agree with this appointment, and has communicated with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's response to the official opposition's objection was to put on notice today a motion that states:

> That, in accordance with subsection 49(1) of the Official Languages Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. 31, and pursuant to Standing Order 111.1(2), the House approve the appointment of Madeleine Meilleur as Commissioner of Official Languages, for a term of seven years.

We believe this is insulting and unacceptable. The nomination process should be halted here and now until a proper consultation process is allowed to take place.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, we will be providing a written elaboration on our motion forthwith.

The Speaker: Let me thank the hon. member for Victoria and the opposition House leader for their interventions. Obviously, I look forward to the written submission from the hon. member for Victoria, and of course will review this and the oral submissions, and come back in due course with a ruling.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to be helpful, I return to the problems with observing and honouring Standing Orders 16 and 18, which make it against the rules of this place to interrupt people when they are speaking or to speak disrespectfully. The use of the term "heckling" is no longer adequate. Heckling suggests occasional interruptions by individual members who yell something out.

I do feel for those members of the opposition parties who are not participating. Clearly, many people on these benches are caught up in what appears to be a roar of derision and rudeness from their colleagues. Not every member of the opposition is participating, but they are lost in what becomes a sort of amorphous blob of rage, like some sort of non-human creature craving raw meat. I do not know what can be done, but I urge my colleagues to look at the Standing Orders, and try to observe them.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her point of order, and her attempt to help the Speaker. Clearly, members know, I believe, the Speaker is not empowered to comment on the quality of either questions or answers or things that are said here. However, we do have Standing Orders, which the Speaker attempts to enforce and asks members to follow. I thank the member for her intervention in this regard.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1520)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 17 petitions.

Mr. Speaker, I move:

> That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

The Speaker: 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1555)

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

(Division No. 280)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Aubin
Ayoub	Badawey
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Benson	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boissonnault	Bossio
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Bratina	Breton
Brison	Caesar-Chavannes
Cannings	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Chan	Chen
Choquette	Christopherson
Cormier	Cullen
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeCourcey	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Donnelly
Dubé	Dubourg
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)	Freeland
Fry	Fuhr
Garneau	Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Graham	Grewal
Hardcastle	Hardie
Harvey	Hehr
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hutchings
Iacono	Johns

Jones
Jordan
Jowhari
Julian
Kang
Khera
Kwan
Lametti
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Laverdière
LeBlanc
Lebouthillier
Lefebvre
Lemieux
Leslie
Levitt
Lightbound
Long
Longfield
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Malcolmson
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
Mathyssen
May (Cambridge)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCrimmon
McDonald
McGuinty
McKay
McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès
Mendicino
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Morrissey
Mulcair
Murray
Nantel
Nassif
Nault
Ng
O'Connell
Oliphant
Oliver
O'Regan
Ouellette
Paradis
Peschisolido
Peterson
Petitpas Taylor
Philpott
Picard
Poissant
Quach
Qualtrough
Ramsey
Rankin
Ratansi
Rioux
Robillard
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rota
Ruimy
Rusnak
Sahota
Saini
Sajjan
Sangha
Sansoucy
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schiefke
Schulte
Serré
Sgro
Shanahan
Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sohi
Sorbara
Spengemann
Stetski
Stewart
Tabbara
Tan
Tassi
Vandal
Vandenbeld
Vaughan
Virani
Weir
Whalen
Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Zahid– — 201

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Arnold
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Benzen
Bergen
Berthold
Bezan
Boudrias
Brassard
Brown
Calkins
Carrie
Clarke
Clement
Cooper
Deltell
Diotte
Doherty
Dreeshen
Eglinski
Falk
Finley
Fortin
Gallant
Généreux
Genuis
Gill
Gladu
Harder
Hoback
Jeneroux
Kelly
Kent
Kitchen
Kmiec
Kusie
Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Liepert
Lobb
MacKenzie
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nater
Nicholson
Nuttall
Paul-Hus
Pauzé
Poilievre
Reid
Rempel
Richards
Ritz
Saroya
Schmale
Shields
Sopuck
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Sweet
Thériault
Tilson
Trost
Van Kesteren
Van Loan
Viersen
Wagantall
Warawa
Warkentin
Watts
Waugh
Webber
Wong
Yurdiga
Zimmer– — 84

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1600)

[*English*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

BILL C-4—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an agreement has been reached between a majority of the representatives of recognized parties under the provisions of Standing Order 78(2) with respect to the consideration of Senate amendments to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act. Therefore, I move:

> That, in relation to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the Senate amendments stage of the said bill; and
>
> That, fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on the day allotted to the consideration of the Senate amendments to the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the bill then under consideration all be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 281)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Arya
Aubin
Ayoub
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Beech
Bennett
Benson
Bibeau
Bittle
Blaikie
Blair
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boissonnault
Bossio
Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet
Bratina
Breton
Brison
Caesar-Chavannes
Cannings
Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger
Champagne
Chan
Chen
Choquette
Christopherson
Cormier
Cullen
Cuzner
Dabrusin
Damoff
Davies
DeCourcey
Dhaliwal
Dhillon
Donnelly
Dubé
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseault
Duvall
Dzerowicz
Easter
Ehsassi
El-Khoury
Ellis
Erskine-Smith
Eyking
Eyolfson
Fergus
Fillmore
Fisher
Fonseca
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland
Fry
Fuhr
Garneau
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale
Graham
Grewal
Hardie
Harvey
Hehr
Holland
Housefather
Hughes
Hutchings
Iacono
Johns
Jones
Jordan
Jowhari
Julian
Kang
Khera
Kwan
Lametti
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Laverdière
LeBlanc
Lebouthillier
Lefebvre
Lemieux
Leslie
Levitt
Lightbound
Long
Longfield
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Malcolmson
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
Mathyssen
May (Cambridge)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCrimmon
McDonald
McGuinty
McKay
McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès
Mendicino
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Morrissey
Murray
Nantel
Nassif
Nault
Ng
O'Connell
Oliphant
Oliver
O'Regan
Ouellette
Paradis
Peschisolido
Peterson
Petitpas Taylor
Philpott
Picard
Poissant
Quach
Qualtrough
Ramsey
Ratansi
Rioux
Robillard
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rota
Ruimy
Rusnak
Sahota
Saini
Sajjan
Samson
Sansoucy
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schiefke
Schulte
Serré
Sgro
Shanahan
Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sohi
Sorbara
Spengemann
Stetski
Stewart
Tabbara
Tan
Tassi
Vandal
Vandenbeld
Vaughan
Virani
Weir
Whalen
Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Zahid– — 197

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Albrecht
Allison
Ambrose
Arnold
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Benzen
Bergen
Berthold
Bezan
Boudrias
Brassard
Brown
Calkins
Carrie
Clarke
Clement
Cooper
Deltell
Diotte
Doherty
Dreeshen
Eglinski
Falk
Finley
Fortin
Gallant
Généreux
Genuis
Gill
Gladu
Harder
Hoback
Jeneroux
Kelly
Kent
Kitchen
Kmiec
Kusie
Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Liepert
Lobb
MacKenzie
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nater
Nicholson
Nuttall
Paul-Hus
Pauzé
Poilievre
Reid
Rempel
Richards
Ritz
Saroya
Schmale
Shields
Sopuck
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Sweet
Thériault
Tilson
Trost

Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Viersen	Wagantall
Warawa	Warkentin
Watts	Waugh
Webber	Wong
Yurdiga	Zimmer– — 84

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

RESUMING DEBATE

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the government's motion to disagree with the amendment by the Senate to Bill C-4. In fact, I am saddened to have to speak to this bill again.

Bill C-4 was passed by this House, with no amendments, and sent to the other place, where it was adopted at second reading and where it also went through the committee process, again with no amendments being tabled or adopted.

However, at third reading, certain members of the other House proposed amendments. Of course, as parliamentarians, it is certainly appropriate to study legislation before either place and to propose amendments that would improve or clarify the bill at hand. In this instance, the amendments proposed served to completely gut the bill. Senator Tannas' amendment would have had Bill C-525, from the previous government, reinstated. Senator Dagenais' amendment would have done the same with the previous government's Bill C-377. The latter was subsequently withdrawn, so I will speak to the remaining amendment.

The card check system for union certification seems to be a preoccupation of the Conservative members in this House and in the other place. One could put it down to ideology, I suppose, or consternation that something their party, their government, put in place while in government is being dismantled. That is understandable.

What is less understandable is the fact that the Conservatives continue to try to resurrect a law that has been judged by non-partisan experts to be unfair and unnecessary. Andrew Sims, vice-chair of the 1996 task force to review the Canada Labour Code, said:

> ...the two bills that are repealed by Bill C-4....both had the air of one side seeking political intervention for more ideological, economic, or relationship reasons, and they have corroded the view that legislative reform at the federal sector is based on the tripartite model.

At committee we heard testimony from respected experts, both employer and employee stakeholders and academics, that the previous government's Bill C-525 was a law that was enacted on the false premise that it was indeed the very bedrock of democracy, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Conservatives like to compare the union certification process to elections, but testimony and evidence from expert after expert debunked this claim. The analogy, simply put, is a false one.

Here is what Prof. Sara Slinn, associate professor, Osgoode Hall Law School, at York University, had to say about the previous government's Bill C-525:

> ...there is a faulty political election analogy at work here. Mandatory vote supporters commonly rely on a political election analogy founded on the view that certification votes are analogous to political campaigns and elections. The attraction of this argument is understandable, appealing as it does to ideas of free speech and informed choice and workplace democracy, but it's a false analogy.
>
> The nature of union representation is not analogous to government power or political representation, and as a result, the nature of decision-making in a union vote is not analogous to that in a political election. First, the nature of the decision is different. Certification doesn't transform the employment relationship. It simply introduces the union as the employee's agent for the limited purpose of bargaining and administering any collective agreement that the union may be able to negotiate. The employer's overriding economic authority over employees continues in any event.
>
> Secondly, there is no non-representation outcome possible in the political context. In political elections citizens vote between two or more possible representatives. There is no option to be unrepresented, so...if union representation elections were to be analogous to political elections, then it would be a vote among different collective employer representatives with no option for non-representation. That's simply not the system that we have anywhere in Canada.

It seems appropriate for me to once again refer to the testimony of Prof. Slinn, who also addressed the issue of the card check versus secret ballot votes for union certification.

● (1615)

> ...in terms of cards being a reliable measure of employee support, it's often contended that votes more accurately indicate employees' desire for union representation than cards, suggesting that card-based certification fosters union misconduct to compel employees to sign cards. Although this is possible, there is no evidence, either in academic studies or in the case law from jurisdictions that use this procedure, that it is a significant or a widespread problem. Anecdote isn't evidence, and certainly it shouldn't be a compelling basis for legislative change in the face of a lot of academic research finding that mandatory vote systems have negative effects on labour relations and that employer interference in certification is indeed a significant and widespread problem.

My Conservative colleagues want to seriously curtail, I believe, the ability of Canadians to join unions.

Whenever there has been adversity suffered by working people or unfair or unsafe working conditions, unions have been there to advocate for fairness and for safer and more humane working conditions. Unions have been at the forefront of raising awareness and fighting for issues that affect everyone, from the dangers of asbestos in the workplace to the plight of the next generation of workers facing a future of temporary and precarious work.

I am proud to recognize the efforts of the labour movement in Canada in educating Canadians about the scourge of asbestos. I know that all Canadians look forward to the day when asbestos is finally banned in Canada.

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the Westray mine disaster, when 26 miners were killed, I am also extremely proud of the tireless efforts of the United Steelworkers, whose advocacy on behalf of Westray families resulted in the Westray law. We just have to make sure that all levels of government enforce this law.

Unions and their members have long been the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, raising the alarm on many important issues, and any attempt by the Conservatives, whether in the House or in the other place, to make it harder for Canadians to join unions begs the question why. Why the attack on the constitutional right of working men and women to organize themselves in joining unions?

Canadians have the right of freedom of association, and the card check system has served Canadian workers and Canadian workplaces well for decades. The previous government's Bill C-525 was just a thinly veiled attempt, based on dubious anecdotal examples, to tip the balance to the side of the employer, and employers already have the upper hand in most instances.

Rather than refute, once again, the many problems with Bill C-525, allow me to ask my Conservative colleagues what their motivation was in bringing in such an obviously anti-union, anti-worker, and therefore, in my opinion, anti-democratic law?

To quote Hassan Yussuff, from the Canadian Labour Congress:

> Why would an employer care if the workers want to join the union? If it's their free democratic and constitutional right in this country, why would employers want to interfere in it other than the fact that if you do have a vote, it gives the employer time to use all kinds of tactics during the time the vote has been ordered? I could list some of the companies that clearly said they were going to close the facility, or cut people's salaries, or lay people off. Of course, ultimately it changed the workers' ability to truly exercise their free choice.

There is no reason to make it harder to join a union other than to tilt the playing field unfairly toward employers.

As I mentioned earlier, it gives me no pleasure to stand here today to speak to Bill C-4 again. In September 2016, I stated in the House my hope that Bill C-4 would receive swift passage so that the risks and restrictions brought about by the previous government's Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 would cease to exist. However, here we are in May 2017, in a déjà vu situation. Just as the previous government's Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were enacted by the Conservatives in a less than straightforward fashion, as part of an omnibus bill through a private member's bill process, as opposed to being introduced and debated as government bills, so too have the Conservatives in the Senate engaged in what I believe are questionable tactics.

● (1620)

Bill C-4 had already been adopted at second reading in the Senate, studied at committee with no resulting amendments, and yet Conservative senators decided to break parliamentary tradition and propose amendments at third reading. According to the *Canadian Encyclopedia*:

> The Senate has not vetoed a bill from the Commons since 1939. The Senate now very rarely makes amendments of principle. The amendments it does make to bills now are almost always related to drafting—to clarify, simplify and tidy proposed legislation.

The amendments proposed by the hon. senators Tannas and Dagenais were most definitely not to clarify, simplify, and tidy, but rather were designed to torpedo the contents of the entire bill. While the motives of the aforementioned senators are very clear, it remains a mystery as to why and how the government seemed unable to shepherd its own bill through the upper chamber.

Back in September when Bill C-4 was first debated, I congratulated the government on making good on one of its election promises. It would seem that my congratulations were a bit premature. I hope the government will take its responsibilities seriously and work diligently to ensure that it keeps this particular promise to Canadians to restore some balance to the collective bargaining process and to eliminate the onerous and unnecessary financial reporting requirements that the previous government imposed on unions.

I had also enumerated for the government the many ways that we as lawmakers could make life better for Canadians. Last fall, at the one year anniversary of the election, I expressed hope that the new government that had promised equality for women, fairness for indigenous people, and sunny ways for all would work closely with all members in this House, as well as unions and civil society, to bring about better jobs and a more secure future for all Canadians. I am disappointed that seven months later, one of the government's very first pieces of legislation has yet to be passed. How much longer do workers have to wait?

The NDP said that Bill C-4 was a good first step, but we reminded the government that there is still much work to be done. The previous government's omnibus bill, Bill C-4, had decimated the health and safety provisions for public sector workers. We need to restore these important safeguards for the people who deliver our essential public services.

As part of the promised labour policy reform, we asked the government to bring in legislation to update and modernize the Canada Labour Code. As we know, sections of the code that deal with workplace harassment, hours of work, overtime pay, and vacation entitlements are about 60 years out of date. It is time we modernized the code to reflect the reality of today's labour market. We have yet to hear from the government about this.

Given the rise in precarious and involuntary part-time employment, will the Liberals work with unions to ensure that part-time, temporary and self-employed workers have the right to the same workplace and labour protections as other Canadians? These workers are faced with a host of added challenges that include eligibility for EI benefits, and erratic hours that create challenges in pursuing an education, arranging child care, and qualifying for a mortgage.

When will the government commit to reinstating a fair minimum wage for workers in federally regulated sectors? Some provinces and municipalities are already acknowledging that a living wage will make a huge difference in making life more affordable. Will the government step up and lead the way?

We heard just the other day in this House how the government will be pursuing a national poverty reduction strategy. A critical element of a poverty reduction strategy, I would say, and I think most people would agree, is a federal minimum wage. As I have said before, another sad fact is the disproportionate number of workers who would be helped by a federal minimum wage are women and young people. We cannot afford not to act.

Through a combination of policy and propaganda, the previous government started to dismantle the system of protections put in place by decades of advocacy by labour organizations and unions. Their right-wing agenda has generated policies that have hurt the environment, social services, and all workers, but especially persons of colour, indigenous communities, women, the poor, and other marginalized groups.

● (1625)

It is way past time for the federal government to bring in stand-alone pay equity legislation. We have studied this issue and consulted, and the evidence is clear and undeniable. Two committee reports have called for action, yet the government is making women wait. It is unconscionable.

All these are contributing factors to greater income inequality. If the government is truly sincere about helping the middle class, then it must immediately address all of these issues. If the government cannot manage to stickhandle its own bill through the legislative process, what hope do we have that these pressing issues will ever get the attention they deserve? Affordable child care, pay equity, decent accessible housing, and a living wage are all measures that would help Canadians from all walks of life.

It is not enough to state that one is a feminist. It is not enough to stand beside union men and women during the election and raise one's fist in solidarity. These are just words and gestures. We must follow that talk, that show of support, with actions, with leadership, with the hard work of making hard decisions.

It is time to stop the rhetoric of gender lenses, gender-based analysis, of consultation, discussion, of a whole-of-government approach. It is time to act. It is time to do the hard work of governing. It is time to stop blaming the previous government for the inaction of the present government.

The government must pass this legislation. The Liberals must bring in the changes they promised the working men and women of this country. I urge the government to finally make good on its promise to repeal the previous government's Bill C-525 and Bill C-377 and to urgently turn its attention to all the pressing issues facing Canadians. My NDP colleagues and I stand ready to help.

● (1630)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Saskatoon West knows that I have a great deal of respect for the work that she has done and continues to do for workers in this country.

When Bill C-525 came to committee, I had the opportunity to sit in on all of the discussion. The Conservatives allocated only two hours to hear witnesses on a bill that changed the Canada Labour Code. The proponent of the bill, the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, provided testimony at committee and then he left. He did not listen to the other witnesses. I found that to be a bit strange being it was a private member's bill. I thought it was odd.

When the member for Red Deer—Lacombe was asked if he had checked with any experts, his answer was no. When he was asked if he had spoken with any people from the labour movement, his answer was no. When he was asked if he had spoken with any academics, again his answer was no. The consultation was not deep.

The other thing he mentioned was that the bill was in response to a mountain of grievances. We asked the chairman of the IRB about the mountain of grievances. We were told the total number of grievances against union bosses was two over 10 years. There were 4,000 renderings and only two were against union bosses.

In this particular case, I am sure that the member would have wanted to present in front of committee. In his presentation in front of the committee on this bill, would he have reaffirmed those statistics?

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for reminding us of some important history about the changes that were proposed with Bill C-525 and Bill C-377. My comments are on a couple of things that my hon. colleague mentioned.

It was really clear from all of the experts we saw and from what we heard from those involved, the unions, employers, and government folks, that the way to change the Canada Labour Code is in a tripartite model so that we keep the balance. Of course, that did not happen the last time. We have heard from the Conservatives and from a few other people that there is a mountain of evidence, which we could not find as it was mostly anecdotal, that somehow people were using a card check system and that somehow people were being prevented from exercising their rights and their votes, none of which we heard from the experts and the academics this time around.

What we heard and reaffirmed—and it is unfortunate that the Senate has sent it back—from all people who are connected to workplaces, the employers, workers, and those who draft legislation, is that when we change the Canada Labour Code, we need to do that in partnership in a tripartite model. What the previous government did skewed that to the employer's interest.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just heard a member of the House of Commons say that the right to vote is an attack on democracy. She said that giving workers the right to vote will allow them to be intimidated.

What she should learn about the right to vote is that if executed properly, it happens through a secret ballot, which means neither the employer nor the would-be union would know how the worker voted. Therefore, it would be impossible for the worker to be intimidated. In fact, that is how elections work. That is how all of us were elected. No member of this House can intimidate a voter, because none of us actually knows for sure how an individual voted. A person walking into a voting booth does so in privacy. The previous government enshrined this principle in the Canada Labour Code to allow workers the same democratic protections.

If the member is so worried about employers intimidating workers, why does she not allow those workers to make their decisions in private, out of view, without the employer looking over the shoulder of the worker, the same way every other democratic country in the world operates? Could it be that her party and the party across the way want to give interest groups the ability to look over the shoulders of workers when they are deciding whether or not they want to vote?

The member said, as the government has, that there was no tripartite consultation when we gave workers the right to vote, tripartite being government, business, and unions. Those are the last three powers that should be consulted, because this is about workers' rights, not the rights of big government, big business, and big unions. It is the right of everyday workers to chart their own course, mark their own destiny, and make their own decisions without intimidation from any of those three powers.

● (1635)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, it gives me another opportunity to remind him about how workplaces are organized. I think he somehow thinks the big balloon, the secret ballot, pops out of the air and sort of arrives in a workplace, and somehow people know it is time to vote.

The problem with a secret vote is that it is announced in the workplaces. Employers, and the evidence is there, intimidate workers because they know when the vote will happen. It is not the unions.

Employers intimidate employees prior to the vote because they know when it will happen. Evidence and research show that for those jurisdictions that bring in those changes, the amount of unionization is reduced. It is not reduced because people do not want unions, as my Conservative colleague has said. It is reduced because working men and women who try to organize the shop floor get intimidated by employers. They say that they will close the plant, which has happened, or will fire or demote people.

A card check system is a democratic way for working men and women in workplaces to talk to one another and ask their workers to join a union simply so they can collectively bargain at their workplace. It does not totally take away employer rights. Union certification, using card check, is a way to ensure working men and women can exercise their constitutional right to organize.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on one theme from my colleague's speech about the other place and the time it has taken to get this bill shuttled through.

There is a couple of ways one could interpret the story of the bill.

The one that is the most charitable to the Liberals, and the story they would tell, is that they are the victims of their own success. They made an independent Senate and now that Senate does not always behave as it should. In this case it has rejected the will of Canadian voters, who overwhelmingly supported parties that thought the anti-labour legislation of the Harper era should be repealed, and that took time. They will hopefully come up with a plan to get it through the second time, although it is not clear what the plan is and how long it will take.

The other interpretation suggested by some is that a number of important labour reforms have not happened. Some have been proposed, like in Bill C-34, I believe it is. We have not seen anything about the fair wages act coming back. We have not seen any full pay equity legislation. One wonders maybe if the government is not a victim of its own success, but that having Bill C-4 stay in the system is a convenient excuse to not be pursuing these other important labour reforms.

I wonder if the member wants to help us parse those various interpretations of what is going on.

● (1640)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has offered a couple of scenarios as to why things are not proceeding. This bill, for example, was introduced almost a year ago. As I said, we are here to ensure and help the government follow through on its promises to working men and women, and we are ready to work. We want the government to step up and start moving its legislation through the House.

The Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Justice; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Status of Woman; the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, Democratic Reform.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the government's answers to Questions Nos. 949 and 950.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I have received a notice from the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek of a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF CONTENTS OF BILL C-49

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege concerning the leak of the contents of Bill C-49, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and other acts respecting transportation and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts, which was introduced yesterday. It has become an established practice in the House that when a bill is on notice for introduction, the House has the first right to know the contents of that legislation.

As Speaker Milliken explained on March 19, 2001, at page 1840 of the *Debates*:

> In preparing legislation, the government may wish to hold extensive consultations and such consultations may be held entirely at the government's discretion. However, with respect to material to be placed before parliament, the House must take precedence. Once a bill has been placed on notice, whether it has been presented in a different form to a different session of parliament has no bearing and the bill is considered a new matter. The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent rule which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

The required confidentiality expected before the unveiling of this bill was simply not respected due to the government's so-called pre-positioning for Bill C-49 earlier this week.

Allow me to explain.

First, for context, all the information the House had when a notice for the bill was tabled Friday afternoon was that it would bear the long title, "An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and other Acts respecting transportation and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts". Considering the wide scope of the activities of Transport Canada, a title like this one could be used with respect to any mode of transport or any type of activity the department undertakes. However, despite the ambiguous bill title, yesterday's Toronto *Star* revealed that this legislation would be called the "Transportation Modernization Act" and reported many of the bill's details. That short title, set out in clause 1, only became known to us once the bill was tabled, well after yesterday's Toronto *Star* had gone to print.

Furthermore, the CBC website, on Monday evening, stated, "The...government will introduce legislation for a passenger bill of rights Tuesday in a move that will set a national standard for how airline passengers are treated in Canada." The bill's summary reads, on page 2:

> With respect to air transportation, it amends the Canada Transportation Act to require the Canadian Transportation Agency to make regulations establishing a new air passenger rights regime and to authorize the Governor in Council to make regulations requiring air carriers and other persons providing services in relation to air transportation to report on different aspects of their performance with respect to passenger experience or quality of service.

CTV National News offered more information to its viewers on this legislation during its broadcast Monday night. It stated, "CTV News has learned the government will mandate minimum levels of reimbursement for travel disruptions and lost luggage." I was watching the news at the time and was extremely surprised to see such detail being made public for a bill that had not yet been made public in Parliament. Later in the same CTV report, I heard, "Under the bill Transport Minister...will table tomorrow, airlines would provide clear and transparent rules so passengers know when they're entitled to compensation; airlines would compensate travellers for flights delayed or cancelled, though not for weather or air traffic..."

Turning to clause 19 of Bill C-49, we see that *CTV News* was reporting on the proposed new paragraphs 86.11(1)(a),(b), and (c) of the bill.

Meanwhile, on CBC's *The National*, viewers were told, "CBC News has learned the legislation is also expected to stop airlines from charging parents extra to sit with their kids." In this case, CBC was reporting on the proposed new paragraph 86.11(1)(d) from the bill, which says, "respecting the carrier's obligation to facilitate the assignment of seats to children under the age of 14 years in close proximity to a parent, guardian or tutor at no additional cost." This is specific detail of the legislation that could not have been guessed at ahead of time by the CBC. Details of the bill were clearly leaked.

● (1645)

Furthermore, the CBC report noted "don't expect exact compensation levels tomorrow. They won't be written into the law."

If you were watching CTV Monday night, Mr. Speaker, you would have known that "The exact rates for compensation under the new rules will be set at a later date by the Canadian Transportation Agency and reviewed regularly."

This was in reference to the proposed new subsection 86.11(1) of the bill, which reads, "The Agency shall, after consulting with the Minister, make regulations in relation to flights to, from and within Canada, including connecting flights."

It is clear this was no simple, accidental leak, though that would also be inexcusable, but, rather, this appears to be the result of a systemic advance briefing of the media about pending legislation as there would be no other way for them to know such specific detail about the bill. Details such as airlines not being able to charge extra for parents to sit next to their children, or that the fines would not be detailed in the bill, or that airlines would be forced to compensate travellers for delays and missed flights could only be known by the media as a result of a leak.

As the Conservative Party critic for transport, I cannot hold the government to account if I learn about the content of the legislation through the news and not through Parliament. That is why this is so important.

As Speaker Milliken said in the ruling I cited earlier:

> To deny to Members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning Members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

Speaker Milliken also found a prima facie case of privilege in connection with advance leaks to the media about a bill to be introduced, on page 6085 of the *Debates* for October 15, 2001.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, you also had occasion to find a prima facie case of privilege last year, on April 19, 2016, on the premature disclosure of the contents of Bill C-14, the assisted dying bill. On page 2443 of *Debates*, the Chair stated:

> In this instance, the chair must conclude that the House's right of first access to legislative information was not respected. The chair appreciates the chief government whip's assertion that no one in the government was authorized to publicly release the specific details of the bill before its introduction. Still, it did happen, and these kinds of incidents cause grave concern among hon. members. I believe it is a good reason why extra care should be taken to ensure that matters that ought properly to be brought to the House first do not in any way get out in the public domain prematurely.
>
> Thus, the available precedents lead me to conclude that this incident constitutes a prima facie question of privilege...

The House considered and passed a motion to refer that matter to the procedure and House affairs committee, which has yet to report on the situation. I understand it was last considered in September, when the Liberal majority voted down a number of motions intended to allow the committee's investigation to continue.

It is incumbent upon us, as the opposition, to call out the government for these abuses of Parliament, and to place before the Chair any perceived breaches of the privileges of the House of Commons, since you, Mr. Speaker, are the defender of the rights and privileges of the House.

Based on the facts I have presented, and the clear precedents on this matter, I believe you should have no trouble in finding a prima facie case of privilege.

● (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we take the issue very seriously. We will get back to the House as soon as we can, once we have had the opportunity to review what the member has stated and to look into the matter at hand.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this matter is obviously of concern to the NDP as well. We do think that there are other cases not cited by the member that support the idea that the media should not be getting sneak peeks at legislation. We know, for instance, in the case of the report on Monday night, that members could be asked anytime before or after the media have that information to comment, and not having seen the legislation, we would not be in a position to do so.

I want to raise a case from March 14, 2001. A question of privilege was raised regarding a briefing the Department of Justice held for members of the media on a bill not yet introduced in the House, while denying members access to the same information.

Speaker Milliken ruled that the provision of information concerning legislation to the media without effective measures to secure the rights of the House constituted a prima facie case of contempt.

The matter was referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. In its 14th report presented to the House on May 9, 2001, the committee found that the privileges of the House and of its members had been breached: "This case should serve as a warning that our House will insist on the full recognition of its constitutional function and historic privileges across the full spectrum of government."

However, the committee did not recommend any sanctions at that time, in light of the apology of the Minister of Justice and the corrective actions that were being taken to ensure such events did not reoccur—presumably, actions that we would like to see sustained.

The ruling said, at that time, "To deny Members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning Members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone. Even if no documents were given out at the briefing—" and I think this is important to underline to you, Mr. Speaker, "...it is undisputed that confidential information about the Bill was provided. While it may have been the intention to embargo that information as an essential safeguard of the rights of this House, the evidence would indicate that no effective embargo occurred."

There are at least some important similarities between those two prima facie cases, Mr. Speaker, so I would encourage you to consider that ruling of Speaker Milliken when you are considering this issue.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. members for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek and Elmwood—Transcona for their interventions. I look forward to the intervention from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons or someone else from the government side, and I will take the matter under advisement and come back to the House in due course.

* * *

● (1655)

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North to give him an opportunity to get a few words on the record. I am sure everybody is looking to forward that.

I am happy to rise today to speak on the Senate amendments to Bill C-4, but first I want to say that I am very pleased that the Senate chose to accept to repeal Bill C-377 in its entirety. I will focus my comments today on the amendments that relate specifically to the repeal of Bill C-525, which deals with the fundamental right of workers to organize themselves into a union.

Everyone, including labour, employers, and government, wants a fair and legitimate certification process that would do two things. First, it would allow workers to make a free and informed decision about whether they want to join a union or not; second, it would be created through a fair and balanced tripartite consensus process that is based on fact, not ideology, and in which the changes to be made would not be imposed on the stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the lack of evidence for the need for Bill C-525 and the united opposition to the process it imposed on labour relations systems made Bill C-525 unsuitable legislation for changing a fundamental aspect of the Canada Labour Code. That is why I oppose the Senate amendments and would respectfully ask members of this House to do the same.

Let me share with the House the reasons for my opposition.

My opposition is first to the process through which Bill C-525 was introduced and passed. I know proponents of the bill say the process is unimportant and that the only thing that matters is the secret ballot. It is simply a case of "the ends justify the means" approach that we saw with the previous government.

This approach not only shows a complete lack of knowledge about good labour relations but also a total disrespect to the parties involved, the employers, labour practitioners, and regulators who have the responsibility to enforce a law that was developed through a poisoned process. Labour law systems are very complex, and the ones that work well are based on a delicate balance between the interests of labour and management that must be respected if and when reforms are to be made.

The stakeholders in the federal labour sector long ago developed a proven process to amend federal labour legislation. It is known as the tripartite process. As a result, there exists a delicate balance that serves fairly the interests of employers, unions, workers, and the Canadian economy.

The last major consultative review of part one of the Canada Labour Code occurred in 1995, and the subsequent report, entitled "Seeking a balance" was authored by the well-respected labour-neutral Andrew Sims.

Mr. Sims said that if labour laws are to be changed, it should be done because there is a demonstrated need due to the legislation no longer working or serving the public's interest, and it should be done on a consensus basis. Based on the testimony in the House of Commons and the testimony the committee heard from the major employer and employee groups as well as the evidence from the Canada Industrial Relations Board, Bill C-525 failed to meet that standard.

Beyond the process, let us talk about the evidence, or the lack thereof, for Bill C-525. The sponsor of the bill, the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, had justified the necessity for his bill by saying:

> ...when we see the mountain of complaints that end up at the labour relations board, it is concerning to me.

I think it would be concerning to everyone if in fact there was indeed a case such as this. Fortunately, it is simply not true. According to Canada Industrial Relations Board, there have been only two founded certification complaints against unions in 4,000 decisions rendered in the prior 10 years before Bill C-525 was passed. In fact, there were more founded complaints against employers than against unions.

● (1700)

A past chairperson of the CIRB, Elizabeth MacPherson, stated in committee testimony, "It's not a huge problem." There was no evidence ever given to show that the federal card check system was not working in the best interests of workers in either its administrative effectiveness or in its abuse by unions to coerce workers to unionize. What the evidence shows is that employer interference and, more so, employee fear of employer interference is a real phenomenon and is the reason a mandatory vote system produces fewer union certifications.

Sara Slinn was referred to earlier in a previous speech. She testified at the Senate committee during the study of Bill C-525. She is a very well-respected expert on the issue. She said:

> In sum, the research evidence shows that there is no support for the notion that votes are necessarily a superior mechanism to cards for determining union representation. Nor does it support the notion that union intimidation or pressure is a substantial phenomenon in certification. What it does demonstrate is that employer interference and, more so, employee fear of employer interference is a real phenomenon. It's effective, and it's more effective under votes than card-based mechanisms.

What is interesting to note is that the labour program under the previous government actually competed a study on the issue of card check versus mandatory voting at the same time Bill C-525 was being debated. That study concluded that:

> ...the use of [a mandatory vote] regime has been an important factor in the decline in union density in the Canadian business sector.

Unfortunately, the previous government buried that study, and it was only released when we took over the reins of government. It is a fair question to ask why that report was not released. I believe it was not made public because the report's conclusion supports the independent research that shows the answers to the critical question of why union density decreases under mandatory vote versus card check. The evidence shows it is not because workers do not really want to unionize but because there is a real or perceived threat.

Proponents of the secret ballot would have us believe that ideology trumps this evidence, that the secret ballot is the only factor necessary to ensure a democratic outcome. The member for Carleton quipped during his speech that the minister "used rhetoric to attack the secret ballot, which would make any third-world, tin-pot dictators proud." That is right in *Hansard* too. It is he who would make tin-pot dictators proud by claiming the only factor necessary to prove that democracy has been served is solely the use of a secret ballot. The third-world tin-pot dictators that the member speaks of, like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe or Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, have all continued to remain elected through a system that uses a secret ballot. In fact, there are many countries around the world that conduct secret-ballot elections that many members in the chamber, perhaps all, would agree are not true democracies.

My point is that I do not think we can look at one factor in isolation to judge how effective and democratic a system is, including one that governs union certification. Instead, we must look at all factors in total that influence the process to determine how best to move forward.

Our government believes in a fair and democratic certification program, one that is based on evidence, not ideology or rhetoric, and is agreed upon through a respected tripartite process in the federal jurisdiction. We believe the card check certification is that system.

When our party ran for election, we promised to repeal these laws. We remain strongly committed to supporting the rights of workers. In order for workers and employers, society, and the economy to prosper, we need fair and balanced labour legislation. Bill C-4, as it was originally passed by 204 members in this House, would achieve that goal. I ask members to oppose the Senate amendments and restore fair and balanced labour laws in this country.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of debates in this House is to consider legislation that is coming forward and then to hear differing opinions and bring forward thoughtful amendments that will be incorporated at committee before things go on to the Senate. However, it seems to me that this week the government shut down debate on three bills coming before the House and then refused thoughtful amendments in committee and used its majority to ram them through to the Senate.

Would the member not agree that a better process is the democratic approach of having these thoughtful amendments considered by the House at committee, which is our work, instead of making the Senate do our work?

● (1705)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, the member is a new and capable member of the House. However, anyone who was here before knows that for a Conservative member to stand up and rail against parliamentary process is laughable, and I heard the chuckles from the veteran members on this side. We heard the member in the front row here rant that the Conservatives invoked closure in the House 100 times, and now they are more holier-than-thou.

The legislation we are putting forward today is in the best interests of not just Canadian workers but the economy. Fair and balanced labour laws are important to the success of this country. That is why we committed to it during the election, that is why it was one of the earliest pieces of legislation we presented, and that is why we look forward to supporting it, and making sure it is passed.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague made the case very well for why we need card check verification in Canada at the federal level, and indeed all levels. However, the real issue is the delay we have experienced, because of this bill going to the Senate. The Senate was a mess before. It is a bigger mess now, because there is even less accountability there. We now have unelected, unaccountable people telling this House, which is composed of elected members, two-thirds of which who said in the election they supported restoring fair labour certification practices, that it is not so.

The proper changes to the law are being delayed, because the government cannot get its own legislation through the Senate, in part because of reforms it made to the Senate. Therefore, I would like to know, specifically, what strategy is the government using to ensure passage of the bill through the Senate this time, and in general, how will it secure passage of its bills in a way that is efficient, so that unelected, unaccountable people are not telling the democratically-elected representatives of Canadians what laws to make?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. As a matter of fact, my friend and I had a fairly lengthy discussion about that the other evening.

The amendments that were sent back, obviously, came from the core Conservatives in the Senate, and there was a fair amount of debate around those in the Senate. However, as the elected House, it is our responsibility. It is not uncommon for amendments to come back to this chamber from the Senate. In this case, I am happy that the NDP members see that these amendments should not be supported, and that they will not be supported by their party.

Certainly, we are looking forward to not supporting those amendments. It has been a process, but the time is now. I know organized labour is looking forward to this. As a government, we are very much looking forward to getting this done, and we will do that as soon as the vote is called.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to follow-up on the issue of time allocation, my colleague's point was not to say that time allocation is bad in all cases, but that if the government had dealt with the bills right here, it would not have to play ping-pong with the Senate. If it did not use time allocation, and instead had a thorough debate with amendments here, then it actually might be able to get its legislative agenda through faster, and members of Parliament could be more involved in debate.

What does the member think of that reality?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I remember when Irwin Cotler tried to straighten out a mess the Senate sent to committee. The Senate knew that the legislation it was putting through was unconstitutional. Vic Toews, who was the minister at the time, had to ask the Senate to put amendments in, and then send them back, so that the committee could pass them with a majority. Therefore, to the newer members of this House, we need no lessons from the Conservatives about how to pass legislation.

● (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is such a pleasure to rise and talk yet again about labour relations. Since we have been in government, we have seen a focus on Canada's middle class, and those aspiring to be a part of the middle class. A big part of that is our economy, making sure that we are looking at ways in which we can expand the economy. We understand and appreciate that a healthy middle class, and a growing middle class is healthy for Canada's economy. That is one of the ways in which we expand upon it.

Why do I start on that point? It is because unlike the Conservative Party, we recognize that one of the ways in which we can further advance our economy is by encouraging harmony between management and employees. When we look at what Bill C-4 is all about, it is one of the earliest pieces of legislation we introduced as government. It rectified some bad legislation that the former Stephen Harper government had brought to the House of Commons.

My colleague, who was the critic for labour at the time, on several occasions spoke in the House and defended how important it was that we have a proper balance in labour relations. It is something which the former Conservative government members still have not learned. They are still out of touch with what Canadians want to see. We see that demonstrated on issues such as this. Once again, we have the Conservative Party that is out of touch with what Canadians want. We believe that Canadians want to have a balanced approach. If we are successful doing that, we will be contributing to more economic growth in our country, and that is something we all want to see.

I listened to the two Conservative questions, and members wanted to focus their attention on process. On the issue of time allocation, my colleague had it right. The Harper government used it in excess of 100 times, and Conservatives now want to focus some attention on that issue. It is interesting to see that it is not just the government that has recognized that the Conservative Party does not want to pass this legislation. If it were up to the Conservative Party, this legislation would never see the light of day. Conservatives use excuses of the Senate that the same applied during second and third reading. If we did not use time allocation, the Conservative Party would continue to fill the spaces with the idea of never seeing this legislation pass.

To the credit of the New Democratic Party and the leader of the Green Party, they recognized that. It is rare to see opposition parties get behind and support time allocation. That should speak volumes in terms of why this is good solid legislation, because we have a majority that goes beyond one political party in favour of time allocation on this piece of legislation. I thank my New Democratic colleagues and the leader of the Green Party in recognizing that Bill C-4 is a good piece of legislation. It is something which we talked about in the last election. To restore more positive labour relations was a part of our election platform, and it has been a long time coming as we tried to get it through. Finally, we are starting to see that the will of the House of Commons, which goes beyond just the government party, is to see this legislation ultimately receive royal assent.

We look forward to restoring, and sending the message that labour relations are important to this government. We recognize the valuable contributions that unions have provided in the past, today, and well into the future. As a government we recognize that, and we want to do what we can. In playing our important role, by passing legislation of this nature, it will send a strong message. We thank members across the way who are supporting the bill, and would encourage the Conservative Party to get onside, do the right thing, and support Canada's middle class.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendments tabled by the Senate to Bill C-4 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 282)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Aubin
Ayoub	Badawey
Bains	Barsalou-Duval
Baylis	Beech
Bennett	Benson
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blair
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Boissonnault
Bossio	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Bratina	Breton
Brison	Caesar-Chavannes
Cannings	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Chan	Chen
Choquette	Christopherson
Cormier	Cullen
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCourcey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Di Iorio	Donnelly
Dubé	Dubourg
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fry
Fuhr	Garneau
Garrison	Gerretsen
Gill	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Graham
Grewal	Hardcastle
Hardie	Harvey
Hehr	Holland
Housefather	Hughes
Hutchings	Iacono
Johns	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Julian	Kang
Khera	Kwan
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Laverdière	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Long	Longfield
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Malcolmson	Maloney
Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
Mathyssen	
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCrimmon	McDonald

McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Mulcair
Nantel
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Pauzé
Peterson
Philpott
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Ratansi
Robillard
Romanado
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Sarai
Schiefke
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Simms
Sorbara
Ste-Marie
Tabbara
Tassi
Tootoo
Vandenbeld
Virani
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Morrissey
Murray
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Rioux
Rodriguez
Rota
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sansoucy
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sohi
Spengemann
Stetski
Tan
Thériault
Vandal
Vaughan
Weir
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Zahid– — 212

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Ambrose
Barlow
Bergen
Bezan
Brassard
Calkins
Chong
Clement
Deltell
Doherty
Eglinski
Finley
Généreux
Gladu
Hoback
Kelly
Kitchen
Lake
Liepert
MacKenzie
McColeman
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Nater
Nuttall
Poilievre
Rempel
Ritz
Schmale
Sopuck
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Van Loan
Wagantall
Warkentin
Albas
Allison
Arnold
Benzen
Berthold
Block
Brown
Carrie
Clarke
Cooper
Diotte
Dreeshen
Falk
Gallant
Genuis
Harder
Jeneroux
Kent
Kusie
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lobb
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Motz
Nicholson
Paul-Hus
Reid
Richards
Saroya
Shields
Sorenson
Stubbs
Tilson
Van Kesteren
Viersen
Warawa
Watts
Waugh
Wong
Zimmer– — 79
Webber
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

The House resumed from May 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (genetically modified food), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-291 under private members' business.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Before the Clerk announced the result of the vote:

Hon. Denis Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I mistakenly rose with the members voting against the motion. I am in favour of the motion.

● (1805)

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

(Division No. 283)

YEAS

Members

Aubin
Barsalou-Duval
Beech
Blaikie
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Casey (Charlottetown)
Choquette
Cullen
Davies
Dubé
Dusseault
Dzerowicz
Fortin
Fuhr
Gill
Hughes
Julian
Laverdière
Malcolmson
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mulcair
Nantel
Ouellette
Pauzé
Quach
Rankin
Rota
Schiefke
Ste-Marie
Thériault
Virani– — 67
Badawey
Baylis
Benson
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boulerice
Cannings
Chan
Christopherson
Dabrusin
Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Erskine-Smith
Fry
Garrison
Hardcastle
Johns
Kwan
MacGregor
Marcil
Mathyssen
McKay
Moore
Murray
O'Connell
Paradis
Plamondon
Ramsey
Ratansi
Sansoucy
Schulte
Stetski
Vandal

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Amos
Arnold
Arya
Bains
Bennett
Bergen
Bezan
Bittle
Block
Bossio
Bratina
Brison
Caesar-Chavannes
Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Champagne
Chong
Clement
Cormier
Damoff
Deltell
Dhillon
Diotte
Dreeshen
Duguid
Easter
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyolfson
Fergus
Finley
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Gallant
Généreux
Gladu
Goodale
Grewal
Harvey
Hoback
Housefather
Jones
Jowhari
Kelly
Khera
Kusie
Lametti
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Lemieux
Levitt
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
MacKenzie
Maloney
May (Cambridge)
McColeman
McDonald
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Monsef
Motz
Nater
Ng
Nuttall
Oliver
Paul-Hus
Peterson
Philpott
Poilievre
Albas
Aldag
Alleslev
Ambrose
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Ayoub
Barlow
Benzen
Berthold
Bibeau
Blair
Boissonnault
Brassard
Breton
Brown
Calkins
Carrie
Chagger
Chen
Clarke
Cooper
Cuzner
DeCourcey
Dhaliwal
Di Iorio
Doherty
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eglinski
El-Khoury
Eyking
Falk
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Freeland
Garneau
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Graham
Hardie
Hehr
Holland
Hutchings
Jordan
Kang
Kent
Kitchen
Lake
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Leslie
Liepert
Lobb
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Morrissey
Nassif
Nault
Nicholson
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rempel
Rioux
Robillard
Romanado
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Serré
Shanahan
Shields
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sohi
Sorbara
Spengemann
Stubbs
Tabbara
Tassi
Tootoo
Van Loan
Viersen
Warawa
Waugh
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young
Zahid
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Rodriguez
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Saroya
Schmale
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Simms
Sopuck
Sorenson
Strahl
Sweet
Tan
Tilson
Trost
Vandenbeld
Wagantall
Warkentin
Webber
Wilkinson
Wong
Yurdiga
Zimmer– — 216

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

[*English*]

RAILWAY SAFETY ACT

The House resumed from May 12 consideration of the motion that Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Railway Safety Act (road crossings), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-322 under private members' business.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 284)

YEAS

Members

Aubin
Benson
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boulerice
Cannings
Christopherson
Davies
Dubé
Dusseault
Fortin
Gill
Hughes
Julian
Laverdière
Malcolmson
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Mulcair
Barsalou-Duval
Blaikie
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Choquette
Cullen
Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Garrison
Hardcastle
Johns
Kwan
MacGregor
Marcil
Mathyssen
Moore
Nantel

Pauzé
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Rankin
Sansoucy
Ste-Marie
Stetski
Thériault
Weir– — 46

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Albrecht
Aldag
Alghabra
Alleslev
Allison
Ambrose
Amos
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arseneault
Arya
Ayoub
Badawey
Bains
Barlow
Baylis
Beech
Bennett
Benzen
Bergen
Berthold
Bezan
Bibeau
Bittle
Blair
Block
Boissonnault
Bossio
Brassard
Bratina
Breton
Brison
Brown
Caesar-Chavannes
Calkins
Carr
Carrie
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger
Champagne
Chan
Chen
Chong
Clarke
Clement
Cooper
Cormier
Cuzner
Dabrusin
Damoff
DeCourcey
Deltell
Dhaliwal
Dhillon
Di Iorio
Diotte
Doherty
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz
Easter
Eglinski
Ehsassi
El-Khoury
Ellis
Erskine-Smith
Eyking
Eyolfson
Falk
Fergus
Fillmore
Finley
Fisher
Fonseca
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland
Fry
Fuhr
Gallant
Garneau
Généreux
Genuis
Gerretsen
Gladu
Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale
Graham
Grewal
Harder
Hardie
Harvey
Hehr
Hoback
Holland
Housefather
Hutchings
Iacono
Jones
Jordan
Jowhari
Kang
Kelly
Kent
Khera
Kitchen
Kusie
Lake
Lametti
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Lebouthillier
Lefebvre
Lemieux
Leslie
Levitt
Liepert
Lightbound
Lobb
Long
Longfield
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman
McCrimmon
McDonald
McGuinty
McKay
McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès
Mendicino
Mihychuk
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Morrissey
Motz
Murray
Nassif
Nater
Nault
Ng
Nicholson
Nuttall
O'Connell
Oliphant
Oliver
O'Regan
Ouellette
Paradis
Paul-Hus
Peschisolido
Peterson
Petitpas Taylor
Philpott
Picard
Poilievre
Poissant
Qualtrough
Ratansi
Reid
Rempel
Richards
Rioux
Ritz
Robillard
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rota
Ruimy
Rusnak
Sahota
Saini
Sajjan
Samson
Sangha
Sarai
Saroya
Scarpaleggia
Schiefke
Schmale
Schulte
Serré
Sgro
Shanahan
Sheehan
Shields
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sohi
Sopuck
Sorbara
Sorenson
Spengemann
Strahl
Stubbs
Sweet
Tabbara
Tan
Tassi
Tilson
Tootoo
Trost
Van Kesteren
Van Loan
Vandal
Vandenbeld
Vaughan
Viersen
Virani
Wagantall
Warawa
Warkentin
Watts
Waugh
Webber
Whalen
Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Yurdiga
Zahid
Zimmer– — 245

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

[*English*]

ITALIAN HERITAGE MONTH

The House resumed from May 15 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion 64 under private members' business in the name of Mrs. Schulte.

● (1820)

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

(Division No. 285)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas

Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Amos
Arnold
Arya
Ayoub
Bains
Barsalou-Duval
Beech
Benson
Bergen
Bezan
Bittle
Blair
Block
Bossio
Boulerice
Brassard
Breton
Brown
Calkins
Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chan
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cormier
Cuzner
Damoff
DeCourcey
Dhaliwal
Di Iorio
Doherty
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duvall
Easter
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Falk
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fry
Gallant
Garrison
Genuis
Gill
Goldsmith-Jones
Graham
Hardcastle
Hardie
Hehr
Holland
Hughes
Iacono
Jordan
Julian
Kelly
Khera
Kusie
Lake
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Laverdière
Lebouthillier
Lemieux
Levitt
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Mathyssen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Aldag
Alleslev
Ambrose
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Aubin
Badawey
Barlow
Baylis
Bennett
Benzen
Berthold
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Bratina
Brison
Caesar-Chavannes
Cannings
Carrie
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Chen
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Cullen
Dabrusin
Davies
Deltell
Dhillon
Diotte
Donnelly
Dubé
Duguid
Dusseault
Dzerowicz
Eglinski
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fergus
Finley
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser (West Nova)
Freeland
Fuhr
Garneau
Généreux
Gerretsen
Gladu
Goodale
Grewal
Harder
Harvey
Hoback
Housefather
Hutchings
Johns
Jowhari
Kang
Kent
Kitchen
Kwan
Lametti
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Leslie
Liepert
Lobb
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKenzie
Malcolmson
Marcil
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Monsef
Morrissey
Mulcair
Nantel
Nater
Ng
Nuttall
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Pauzé
Peterson
Philpott
Plamondon
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Rodriguez
Rota
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sansoucy
Saroya
Schiefke
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Simms
Sopuck
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Sweet
Tan
Thériault
Tootoo
Van Kesteren
Vandal
Vaughan
Virani
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj
Yurdiga
Zimmer– — 289
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Moore
Motz
Murray
Nassif
Nault
Nicholson
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Paul-Hus
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Poilievre
Quach
Ramsey
Ratansi
Rempel
Rioux
Robillard
Romanado
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schmale
Serré
Shanahan
Shields
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sohi
Sorbara
Spengemann
Stetski
Stubbs
Tabbara
Tassi
Tilson
Trost
Van Loan
Vandenbeld
Viersen
Wagantall
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Wilkinson
Wong
Young
Zahid

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6:24 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

* * *

● (1825)

SENIORS

The House resumed from February 24 consideration of the motion

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion by the member for Nickel Belt. As the NDP seniors critic, I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to bring our seniors' voices and opinions to the House of Commons.

The motion calls for a study on the development of a national seniors strategy. The NDP has been calling for a national seniors strategy for years. After years of inaction from both Liberals and Conservatives, it is flattering to see a Liberal motion now calling for it.

After organizing 11 town hall meetings across my riding of North Island—Powell River on seniors issues, the people I work for were very clear. They want action. The hundreds of participants had a whole range of grievances that require help.

One woman in particular had a tremendous impact on me. She showed up just days after her mother's passing. With tears in her eyes, she spoke about how many gaps her mother had fallen through, how the care had not been as good as was required. She told me how exhausted she was during this incredibly painful process where, as a daughter, she felt powerless. She said to me, "We need less talking. We need action now." I could not agree with her more.

This motion aims to create a study which may, one day, advise the government on a national seniors strategy. Canadians can see through this Liberal approach and are rightfully worried about the intended impacts of this motion. If this passes, months later we will have a parliamentary report. My concern, and that of many of my constituents, and the concern of the daughter I mentioned earlier, is it is time for reports to be done. It is time for action. With the Liberal government's recent approach in negotiating bilateral health agreements, I remain skeptical that we will see a cohesive national strategy on aging any time soon.

This is serious. Too many seniors are falling through the cracks and families are struggling profoundly. This needs to be addressed.

Canada's population is aging rapidly. For the first time there are more people age 65 and older than there are children between the ages of zero to 14 years. By 2036, seniors are expected to make up 25% of the population. People 85 years of age and older make up the fastest growing group in Canada. This portion of the population grew by 127% between 1993 and 2013.

The accelerating pace of aging in the population carries profound implications for everything from government budgets to pensions, health care, the labour market, and social services. In fact, caring for aging parents costs Canadians an estimated $33 billion a year in out-of-pocket expenses and time taken from work. That figure is expected to grow by more than 20% over the next decade, according to a report released last week by economists at CIBC. We cannot afford to ignore the study. Action is required immediately.

The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development thinks his government has a strong record. We have heard him praise himself and his government when it comes to seniors. He refuses to acknowledge the important role of caregivers and the economic impact of the country's changing demographic.

The first step is admitting one has a problem. It seems the Liberals are still sleeping at the wheel. I have witnessed the financial hardship that caregiving has on people in my riding. Recently, at a town hall I held on the disability tax credit, a gentleman in his eighties came to speak with me about his challenges. This is an important story, and I am absolutely positive it is not a unique one across this country, because it outlines the emerging reality seniors are facing.

He told me that he had a good pension, but now his wife has dementia and he is caring for her. He could not afford to put her in a care facility because there are no rooms that are subsidized and the least expensive placement was $6,000 a month. He simply could not afford to pay that. How many people in Canada cannot afford that amount? He shared with me his deep fears. As the only caregiver, his health is now beginning to fail. I did not know what to say to him when he said to me, "What do we do if I get sick, too?" The response, "We're just going to research it" would be completely meaningless to someone who needs action now.

● (1830)

The NDP has long held the position that to meet the coming challenge of an aging population, we need a thoughtful and strategic approach to seniors care. This motion makes good strides in the right direction, but it falls short of implementing any action other than further study.

It is disappointing that the member took the rare chance of bringing a motion to a vote in order to pat the government on the back for past changes, and without bringing in any real action for seniors. The government cannot get away with doing something symbolic and refusing to take action. The motion is trying to toot the government's horn about the work it has done in order to protect the Liberals from the very real failure of delivering care to our seniors. Once again, they are trying to take the NDP's hard work, and pass it off as their own without taking any concrete action.

Although the motion is self-congratulatory, it fails to mention that the Liberals have not delivered on their clear platform promise of indexing OAS and GIS benefits to a new seniors price index. They have failed to make an immediate investment in home care. They have failed to make prescription drug costs affordable. They have failed at making affordable housing a reality for seniors. Wait times for GIS and OAS are outrageous. We also know that the caregiver and disability tax credits are not filling the huge gaps that caregivers and their families are facing, and I could go on.

The Liberals' veil of self-congratulation is blinding them. The reality for too many seniors is poverty and hard choices. It is time for a national seniors strategy that has action as its core.

Older Canadian women are twice as likely to live in poverty as men. About 30% of senior Canadian women are living below the poverty line. A national strategy should focus not only on improving the lives of seniors but removing the inequality that too many female seniors face.

A new report by the CCPA B.C. office, studying poverty and inequity among British Columbia's seniors, offers us a daunting portrait of the situation on the ground. Poverty in B.C. rose from a low of 2.2% in 1996 to 12.7% in 2014. About 42% of B.C. seniors are currently experiencing core housing needs.

I have heard of too many seniors struggling, making decisions between food and medication, or having to legally separate from their partners because placing one partner in long-term care means the other is left in poverty. These are just a few of the important examples.

The motion needs to be amended to acknowledge the social determinants of health, prevention of illness, medical treatment and care, caregiver support, end of life care, pharmacare, affordable housing, and creating a seniors advocate. Most importantly, a seniors strategy done comprehensively can reduce health care costs. It is simply the right thing to do, both socially and financially.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports that while seniors account for less than 15% of the population, they use approximately 45% of public health spending. The government cannot wait any more. The research is in, and the time for action in now. The people of Canada cannot wait.

The seniors of our country worked hard to build a society of prosperity, generosity, and sound institutions, and they continue to make valuable contributions. Now our country owes them a debt of responsibility. No one should have to grow old in poverty, insecurity, and isolation. Aging is indeed getting tougher. As Canadians age and their vulnerability increases, it is important that we continue advocating for a national seniors strategy. We need to make sure our institutions, and vital public services are strong and ready to meet the challenge of providing necessary services efficiently and effectively.

I will be supporting the motion, but I do so with hope and some hesitancy. I am hoping this will lead to an actual plan of action. No less is required of this increasingly urgent issue. Canadian seniors deserve the very best.

● (1835)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 106, developing a national seniors strategy framework.

In my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets, seniors make up a large portion of the population. As a matter of fact, just over 20% of the residents of South Shore—St. Margarets are over the age of 65.

Seniors across this country face many challenges, but in particular, seniors in rural and remote areas can often be more isolated and alone than their urban peers. All across the country, countless organizations provide services to seniors allowing them to live with dignity and security, and ensuring they are free of exploitation and abuse. I would like to offer a heartfelt thanks to those organizations.

Unfortunately, these programs often cannot reach every person in need, and too many seniors fall through the cracks becoming vulnerable to crime and abuse due to reasons such as lack of affordable housing, poor health care, or low literacy to name a few. This is why it is so important for the government to recognize that seniors require an ongoing different level of attention than other parts of the population.

Some seniors are more vulnerable than others, and face extremely tight financial situations. That is why in budget 2016 our government increased the guaranteed income supplement top-up by up to $947 annually, helping to get more money to the most vulnerable seniors in our communities.

We also cancelled the increase in the eligibility age for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits from 65 to 67, a move that will put thousands of dollars in the pockets of Canadians as they become seniors.

These budgetary decisions clearly demonstrate that we understand the central role that Canadian seniors have played in building this country, and because of this, they deserve safe and prosperous communities to live in and experience the best quality of life possible.

One of the things I frequently heard during the election campaign, and continue to hear since becoming a member of Parliament, is the need for better access to home care. The lives of many seniors could be greatly improved if they were only able to remain in their own homes longer while still receiving the care, and help they need as opposed to moving to a long-term care facility or worse, staying in a hospital until a bed is available for them.

It meant a lot to many of my constituents that in budget 2017 we committed $6 billion to improve access to home care services. Greater access to home care will not only benefit our seniors, by allowing them to stay in their homes, but will also help our health care system by alleviating the issue of beds being tied up for patients on waiting lists.

Seniors also benefit from other sources of social investments in our communities, investments in things like affordable housing, cultural and recreational infrastructure, and public transportation. These all benefit society as a whole, but often disproportionately benefit our seniors.

Our government has committed $5 billion for a new national housing fund, $3.2 billion to support key priorities for affordable housing, $1.8 billion to cultural and recreational infrastructure, and $20.1 billion to support public transit needs in this country. All of these investments will have a direct positive impact on the lives of seniors and those who support them.

Another issue some of our seniors struggle with is mental health. We are seeing disorders such as hoarding becoming an increasing problem for our older population. In my riding, we have a resource called the Mosaic Network, which is a community health network designed to improve the partnerships among those who provide care for seniors and older adults with complex behavioural issues such as hoarding. The network brings together various stakeholders to help increase awareness, increase knowledge, share best practices, and identify and share resources within our communities to work with those who exhibit hoarding behaviour.

It is important that the government recognize grassroots organizations like Mosaic, and support them by making sure that health care stakeholders have the resources they need. Our government's commitment of $5 billion to support mental health initiatives has the potential to make a real difference in the work these organizations do, and in the lives of our seniors.

● (1840)

Quality of life for seniors is about more than just investments in health care, housing, and social programs. It is often simply making sure our seniors stay active, and engaged in their communities and social circles, to reduce the likelihood of isolation and accompanying mental health struggles. Community groups across my riding are finding interesting, and innovative ways for seniors to stay active in their communities. Activities like storytelling, producing documentaries detailing their experiences, live theatre productions, and simple crafting workshops are all ways to exercise their minds and engage our older Canadians.

This year I am particularly pleased that my riding of South Shore —St. Margarets will be hosting the provincial 55+ Games in September. Seniors from all across my riding will be coming to Lunenburg County to participate in activities from soccer to pickle ball, cribbage to shuffle board, and swimming to track and field. All with the objective of keeping seniors active, engaged, and giving them the ability to share experiences with other seniors from around the province.

I would like to recognize Events Lunenburg County for the hard work it has done in bringing this event to our area. Organizations and programs that work with and support seniors often rely on many hard-working volunteers, particularly in rural areas. Community members spend countless hours of their own time on things like preparing meals, providing transportation, or simply visiting and sharing stories with seniors.

Working toward a national seniors strategy would allow us to identify where the shortfalls are, and how we can fill the gap in helping our seniors and those who support them. They need to lead safer, happier, and more active lives.

Seniors organizations also work in collaboration with many other community groups, health care organizations, and law enforcement. I know that in my riding, police forces work to increase personal safety for seniors, through campaigns to raise awareness about fraud and scams, and by providing opportunities to learn first-hand about crime prevention. It is important the government recognize the diverse types of stakeholders at play when we are talking about the lives of seniors.

We are making great strides addressing the issues that affect seniors, not only in my riding but across the country. However, as we have often heard our Prime Minister say, “Better is always possible”, and I believe we can do better to address the needs of older Canadians. As more and more Canadians move into old age, we have to do better.

Before I finish, I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to all the community groups, police officers, health care professionals, home care workers, and friendly visitors in my riding who take time from their day to make the lives of our seniors just a little more enjoyable.

I am absolutely happy to be supporting Motion No. 106 as I believe it is important for this House to clearly demonstrate our commitment to seniors, to give them the comfort in knowing that their concerns are being heard, and that the government is taking action.

I would encourage all my colleagues to lend their support to this motion. I commend my colleague, the member for Nickel Belt, for bringing this motion forward, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to speak to Motion No. 106, and I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for introducing it. I am also going to be introducing a motion one minute before I am done, so I would appreciate you letting me know, Mr. Speaker, when I have reached that one-minute mark.

I met my wife at university. We used to go to different seniors complexes, and I would play guitar and we would sing together and provide a bit of entertainment. It was not great music, but it was the love of our life to honour senior members of our community to thank them, encourage them, interact with them, and dialogue with them.

Through the years, as we started having children, we would visit the local rest home on Sunday after church. We asked the staff if there was someone who was lonely who was not getting visitors. We raised our children by example, saying that it was important to visit, honour, respect, and give dignity to the senior members of our community.

We did that, and we have continued to do that. While I have been busy here in Ottawa, my wife adopted another lady, over the last 10 years, Freda, who just passed away. Now we are looking for a new grandma we can adopt and visit. It is an important part of Canadian culture to honour its senior members, and it is a good indication of the heart and the quality of the country we live in.

I wish I could support Motion No. 106 and recommend that others do, but unfortunately, it has some mischievous political parts in it.

The previous government appointed a minister for seniors. One of the major flaws in this motion is that it is missing a call for the government to appoint a minister for seniors. It was a year and a half ago that this Parliament began. Two years ago, the election process began, and the political parties met with Canadians. The Conservative Party showed by example from the previous Parliament the importance of taking care of seniors and preparing for an aging population.

Right now, one in six Canadians is a senior. In five and a half years, it will be one in five. In 12 years, it will be one in four. This is a major shift in Canada, with an aging population we have to prepare for. That is what the previous government was doing. Unfortunately, the current government does not have a minister for seniors. Senior stakeholders across this country have asked the government to please appoint a minister for seniors and also to begin a national seniors strategy.

I was honoured to be asked by our interim leader to be the critic for seniors. I was honoured to do that, because I love seniors. The fact is, I am a senior, and I realize some of the challenges as our bodies age. We need to provide for our seniors, work with our seniors, and provide the care and dignity they need.

I was shocked that the government refused for the last year and a half to appoint a minister for seniors and did not begin a study on a national seniors strategy. That is what we have asked in question period. We have partnered with the NDP critic, who is asking the same thing. We have a national seniors caucus meeting, and we bring in different guest speakers. What do we hear time and time again? Please appoint a minister for seniors and start work on a national seniors strategy. Time is ticking, Canadian seniors are aging, and the Liberal government is asleep.

Motion No. 106 asks for a study on a national seniors strategy. Fortunately, I am also on the human resources committee, where this would be studied. I have asked the committee for the last year to start on a national seniors strategy. The Liberal government has waited for a year and a half. That is a year and a half lost in preparing for this aging population.

● (1845)

In February, when we saw Motion No. 106, I said that we should begin the study on a national seniors strategy now so we are ready and can get to work on it. The Liberals said they did not want to begin but wanted to wait for Motion No. 106.

It is politically motivated. How is it politically motivated? The first paragraph of Motion No. 106 acknowledges that we have an aging population. We can support that. Senior stakeholders support that. That is what the government has been told. For the last year and a half, that is what Canadians have known. Statistics Canada has told us for the last decade that we need to get ready for the aging population. It highlights and acknowledges that. We can support that.

Paragraph (b) says that the government is working hard to help improve the lives of Canadian seniors by restoring OAS and GIS. It highlights that this as a political document and that there was interference by the Prime Minister's Office saying that it wanted that in the bill. The motion I will be introducing in a moment suggests that we take that out and keep it non-partisan and non-political and focus on taking care of our Canadian seniors. I hope the sponsor of the bill will accept that.

The PMO is also saying that the human resources committee should get to work on a national seniors strategy. However, there are no timelines, and we need to have clear timelines so that we are ready for this aging population instead of having a study that sits on a shelf collecting dust.

Paragraph (d) refers to broadening the mandate of the National Seniors Council to allow it to undertake reviews and analysis on its own initiative. The National Seniors Council was created in 2007 by the previous Conservative government to represent the needs of Canadian seniors. The minister and the Prime Minister's Office were to identify the focus to get ready for the aging population.

The Liberals have instructed the sponsor of Motion No. 106 that this body can create its own mandate, do its own analysis, and do it its own thing, which will cause it to become meaningless. That on its own is the reason Motion No. 106 cannot be supported. Hopefully, the sponsor will agree to an amendment to remove that.

The vast majority of Canadian seniors I have talked to about this agree that we need to appoint a minister for seniors and that we need to start on a national seniors strategy, and hopefully the government will accept that.

We heard from the previous speaker about all the things she wished the government would do. However, she really did not acknowledge and address the issues with respect to Motion No. 106. Motion No. 106 has some flaws that need to be repaired. We would support a study on a national seniors strategy, but let us remove those political, mischievous parts of the motion.

Last Friday, when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health was asked how the government would take care of seniors, I was concerned when he replied that they now have assisted suicide to help take care of this massive growing senior population. We were shocked to hear that. That should not be part of the plan. The plan is to protect seniors, give them dignity, and provide the services they need.

I have highlighted the political parts of Motion No. 106. I hope its sponsor will accept this constructive suggestion. I have talked to him ahead of time, so I hope he will accept this amendment, as it is made in good faith.

Therefore, I move that the Motion No. 106 be amended by replacing all the words in paragraph (b) with “appoint a minister for seniors”, and by deleting paragraph (d).

● (1850)

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to a motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Nickel Belt if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, no, I do not.

The Speaker: There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about our seniors, a growing segment of our population. Seniors worked hard to build our economy and secure the social benefits that we enjoy today.

Our current social security system was designed at a time when seniors represented just a small part of the population and is no longer equipped to respond to today's challenges. In 2035, 25% of our constituents will be seniors. We must take action today to prepare for the future.

In my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, many organizations are already working together daily to improve living conditions for our seniors. I am thinking about the many seniors' federations in Quebec that allow our constituents to remain social and active and that combat isolation. Some 17,000 seniors are part of this network.

In my riding, volunteers at volunteer centres in Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale also do tremendous work by helping meals on wheels deliver food to those who are unable to cook or get around.

Seniors are an incredible resource for our society. They are among those who most often become involved in non-profit organizations and associations. Their dedication commands our respect, and many organizations would not be able to function properly without the volunteer contributions of our seniors. In fact, I do not know what will happen to some of these organizations when that generation is no longer here.

It is our responsibility, as MPs, to promote this kind of community engagement. It is so valuable. Having worked for years in the community sector, I know just how important our seniors are in creating and strengthening social ties.

According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec, volunteers aged 65 and over devote 190 hours a year to volunteer work. That is huge. There are programs to help our seniors get involved in their communities. Take for example the new horizons for seniors program, which provides funding to promote volunteerism among seniors, engage seniors in the community, expand awareness of elder abuse, support the social participation and inclusion of seniors, and provide capital assistance for new and existing community projects and programs for seniors.

The deadline for submitting a funding application is June 23. I invite all organizations and municipalities in my riding to submit an application in order to maintain their involvement in the community.

Most of our seniors live in difficult circumstances today. As members of Parliament, it is our duty to do our best to help them cope with the difficulties they may face. That is why in March I organized an information day on the tax credits that older Canadians and those with disabilities may be eligible for. More than 200 people came to the meeting in Saint-Hyacinthe. Last year, 300 attended. These numbers are evidence of our constituents' need for information.

In fact, due to a lack of information, quite a few of them are missing out on many tax credits and subsidies they could be receiving. In order to address the federal government's failure to provide this information, I prepared a guide for seniors that lists all benefits and supports. This guide will be mailed to all seniors in the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Although I am happy to help our seniors, I would like to point out that this is the government's job. What about those who live in ridings where MPs do not provide such services? How many of our constituents live in difficult circumstances and are missing out on all these tax credits and benefits for lack of information?

● (1855)

Not everyone can afford to pay an accountant to do their taxes for them. Once again, those living in the most vulnerable situations are the first victims.

However, there are other ways this government's policies have failed our seniors. We know that between 75% and 80% of seniors report suffering from one or more chronic health problems. For quite some time now, the NDP has been calling for a national pharmacare program that would allow the federal government to save billions of dollars every year and would make drugs far more accessible to Canadians living in the most precarious situations.

What about the guaranteed income supplement? How many people cannot collect benefits every year because registration is not automatic? This is a simple measure that the government needs to implement immediately.

This government also got rid of the office of the minister responsible for seniors as soon as it announced its first cabinet. The responsibility to establish policies specifically for seniors is now divided among a number of departments, which is not conducive to the development of the national strategy we so desperately need.

There are solutions right in front of us. In October, the NDP put forward a motion to create a national seniors strategy. My colleague from London—Fanshawe did a remarkable job on that and worked with stakeholders to define a national strategy with health, affordable housing, income security, and quality of life components, and to create a seniors' advocate position to make sure those things actually see the light of day.

We are wasting time and money while we wait, yet again, for the government to act. My colleague opposite moved a motion calling for the creation of a national seniors strategy, but I am worried that the government will see this as just another public relations exercise and will not take the motion seriously enough to come up with a meaningful policy that will really make a difference in the day-to-day lives of our seniors.

I am not trying to impugn the government's motives. I am only considering its record since it came into power. Canadians are seeing the Liberals break their promises yet again. The government's policies fall short of meeting their needs and expectations.

The Liberals like to highlight the changes they recently made to old age security and the fact that they increased the guaranteed income supplement for seniors living alone. Those measures are a drop in the bucket. They are bandaids, not real, effective policies developed as part of a national strategy on care and quality of life for seniors.

We do not want the government's smokescreens. It is time for a real and lasting strategy that sets out to address the needs of our seniors. That is what the NDP proposed in the fall. In my opinion, my Liberal colleague's motion is vague. I want clear commitments from the Liberals on what they plan to do and how they plan to implement this national strategy.

I would also like to point out another problem that was overlooked in the motion, namely the vulnerability of senior women. In fact, senior women are twice as likely as men of the same age to live in poverty. Living below the poverty line is the lot of 30% of senior women. A national seniors strategy must include a specific strategy for senior women living in precarious situations.

In my riding, I met with seniors who live below the poverty line. They expect the federal government to show leadership and take action on a national level to ensure that people from coast to coast can have access to the support they need to continue to have a decent life in their community.

In closing, we need to look after this generation, which built our communities, and the seniors of tomorrow.

● (1900)

Every time the Liberals take a step back, more and more people suffer. The NDP has a long-standing commitment to providing support for our seniors. It is now time for this government to step up to the plate and to take action as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to stand in the House tonight and represent my great riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, which you know very well. It is the outskirts of Halifax and Dartmouth and is a very important part of our HRM community.

It gives me great pleasure to speak to the issue of seniors. This topic is extremely important to Canadians. I want to thank my colleague from Nickel Belt for his motion, which is a major step toward, maybe very soon, a national strategy for seniors. It is important to have the discussion, look at all the pieces, and see how we can frame this so we can be successful as quickly as possible. We need to keep in mind the demographic shift in Canada. It is a big issue. We need to talk about it, look at it, study it, analyze it and bring solutions to the table.

Since 2011, we have seen a 20% increase in seniors 65 and older. I should explain that I am talking mostly about the age of 65 and over. In certain parts of the country or in the states 55 is consider being a senior. However, I am focusing more on age 65 and older, and also those who will soon be in that age category.

Atlantic Canada has the highest level of seniors per capita in the country. Whatever the challenge is, it is amplified that much more in Atlantic Canada. Let me add that Nova Scotia has the second-largest number of seniors, a 0.1% differential from New Brunswick. Therefore, the number of seniors aged 65 and over is extremely high in Nova Scotia.

However, it is extremely important to note that my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook has the highest number of seniors in the province of Nova Scotia. We have had an increase of 33.9% in the number of seniors since 2011. That is an enormous increase and is an example of the challenges we will get.

On the other side of the coin, it is important to keep in mind that seniors live longer, which is good news for all of us. We have seen an increase of 20% in seniors living past 85 years old. We have also seen, believe it or not, a 40% increase in seniors living over 100 years old. This is since 2011. These are big numbers and that is why we need to look not at the challenges in front of us, but, as my colleague from Nickel Belt has said, we need to look at this as opportunities available to us.

Again, I want to thank my colleague for that initiative. I believe these discussions can lead to something extremely positive toward a national policy.

Let us talk about seniors. I remember when 55 was the age of retirement. However, seniors now are working much longer, which is extremely positive. They are very successful because they have a lot of experience and skill.

For example, we have noticed that seniors, either before retirement or when they retire, are thinking about starting a business. Those who have started businesses and have had a business for five years or more, that being the point when the difference between success and not so successful is determined, are 70% successful in their business. Younger people are only around 30% successful.

We need to get seniors more involved. We need to talk about how we can do that. Our government has a role to play in promoting the engagement of seniors, of speaking with stakeholders about engaging seniors, which is extremely important. We need to continue to do that.

● (1905)

Some seniors decide to retire. That is a great opportunity as well. After working a number of years, that is an option seniors have and it is extremely beneficial. However, we must keep in mind that those seniors who retire are not staying home. They are active. They are volunteering in communities. They are volunteering in different organizations. They are contributing to the community. They are key community members, supporting it and working hard. However, those individuals have barriers. These are the types of conversations we need to have.

We need to have a discussion on how we can help them. One of the barriers would be the cost to do activities, such as volunteering. Transportation is another barrier. It would help seniors to know what opportunities are available them to help with those barriers. We need to promote and communicate those opportunities much better so seniors can get more involved. We need to tap into those resources. Those individuals have the skills, the knowledge, and the willingness to contribute to their communities. That is value added, and we need to take advantage of that.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

I would also like to say that, according to a 2014 report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, although seniors represent only 15% of the population, they account for 45% of health care costs. That certainly puts a lot of pressure on the system.

That is why we need to find ways to help these people in order to limit health care needs and chronic illnesses. How can we do that? We can obviously keep promoting existing strategies. We need to encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle and be active. That will certainly help. We also need to ensure that we have the means to support seniors in doing just that. That is essential. We obviously also need to take advantage of what seniors have to offer.

[*English*]

Rising poverty among seniors is a big issue. Many of my colleagues have spoken about that today. We must ensure that we continue to speak about this and try to find a solution. For example, in Nova Scotia, 33% of single seniors over 65 are low-income seniors. We need to continue to support them.

The correlation between seniors and income and good health is essential. If their income is better and they are able to stay more active, then their health will be improved and they will be able to continue to contribute. That is an important factor as well.

Let me list some of the key things we have done.

Increasing the GIS, the guaranteed income supplement, has helped to lift 900,000 seniors out of poverty, which is extremely important. Restoring the OAS, the old age supplement, to 65 from 67 represents $17,000. Putting together a national housing strategy and the health accord help support seniors, as well as extending compassionate care from six weeks to 26 weeks.

It is extremely important to know that since we were elected, our government has put many strategies in place to support seniors. This conversation is essential to allow us to look at the big picture and possibly, in the near future, have a strong national seniors' strategy for all Canadian.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to speak on an important motion by the member for Nickel Belt.

Motion No. 106 is an important motion, because seniors make up a growing demographic in Canada. In fact, the recent 2016 census showed that we are growing at an alarming rate. We are up to 16.9%. In fact, there are more seniors in Canada than there are people 15 years of age and younger. Meanwhile, the portion of the working-age population, those between the ages of 15 and 64, has declined from 68% to 66%.

Given that seniors are one of the largest and fastest-growing demographics in Canada, it is paramount that we now take action to deal with the corresponding effects of an aging population. This is why this motion is so important.

However, Motion No. 106 highlights a lack of seriousness on behalf of the Liberal government when it comes to addressing the needs of Canadian seniors. It leaves out necessary action that must be taken in order to appropriately address related concerns.

Over the years, I have presented several petitions calling for a national strategy for seniors and palliative care. A national strategy would ensure that many of the issues important to seniors, such as establishing a national strategy for Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, improving palliative care, and ensuring quality home care are listened to and addressed. Such a strategy is addressed in section (e) of Motion No. 106.

However, something that is not addressed by this motion is the lack of representation for seniors within the Liberal government's cabinet. Our Conservative Party believes that seniors are important, and as such, they deserve their own portfolio. We have a minister for children and families, as well as a minister for youth, so where is the minister for seniors? It is clear that Canadians recognize the importance of such an appointment, but does the government?

The dramatic greying of Canada's population will reshape the economy, stifle growth, and force governments to provide for a growing number of seniors with a shrinking pool of taxpayers. Currently the government does not have a sustainable plan to address both the challenges and opportunities that stem from this unique shift in our country's population. Instead of a plan, it has plunged our country deeper into debt, along with our citizens.

In fact, budget 2017 did very little for seniors. Instead of introducing tax measures that would have helped make life more affordable for those living on a fixed income, it scrapped tax credits that seniors rely on, credits such as the family caregiver tax credit and the public transit tax credit. Budget 2017's catch-all policies with the word "senior" stamped on them are not enough to address the very real needs of our aging population.

Another problematic aspect of Motion No. 106 is section (b), which seeks to restore the age of eligibility for old age security to 65. Everyone knows Canadians are living longer and healthier lives, and the OAS program needs to reflect this new reality and provide the option for individuals to work longer and receive higher retirement benefits.

In budget 2016, the Liberal government set up an advisory council. That advisory council came back to them in 2017, saying that the government needed to address this point, that it was important, that they could see the need. Motion No. 106 is in direct contradiction to what the advisory council stated.

If the age of eligibility for OAS returns to 65, in 13 years the cost will go up by $10.4 billion. As well, the guaranteed income supplement will go up by $1.2 billion in 13 years. Given Canada's current economic situation, it is of great concern that the Liberal Prime Minister has demonstrated that he does not take long-term financial sustainability seriously. Canadian seniors deserve a government that will stand up for their needs and deliver long-term results.

Our previous Conservative government has a strong and dynamic record of support for seniors. We were transparent and vocal on ending elder abuse and senior communal isolation by establishing the New Horizon for Seniors grant program in 2011. Our record also shows that Conservatives made the largest increase to the guaranteed income supplement in a quarter of a century. We created tax-free savings accounts to allow Canadians to benefit. Our previous government expanded the compassionate care program and provided tax breaks to caregivers.

In 2011, we reduced the number of Canadians in need of housing through a multi-level government framework and an investment of $1.4 billion. Close to 184,000 households benefited. I know I am running out of time, but I just want to say a couple more things.

● (1915)

I am concerned about the future of our aging population. The Liberal government continues to demonstrate a lack of respect for Canadian seniors and their concerns by refusing to appoint a minister of seniors or commit to a timeline for a national seniors strategy. Therefore, I urge this House to support the amendments to Motion No. 106 and support meaningful action for seniors.

I had a lot more to say and I wish I had the time to say it, but I will say that seniors play an important role in our families, our communities, and our workplaces. They are the people who started this country. They are the people who still contribute some of the greatest amounts of volunteer time in our communities across Canada.

I am proud to be a member of the senior caucus and I am proud to be a senior myself. I am not turning grey like some of them, but I am losing hair like a lot of them. I want to thank all the seniors across my riding and across Canada who have given their time to our communities, and this question begs to be asked: should Canada's fastest-growing demographic not have their own voice in government?

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all of my colleagues who participated in the debate on developing a national seniors' strategy, as well as those who contributed to it. This is very important for our aging population, and we need to take action.

I thank all of the organizations in the riding of Nickel Belt that provided me with a great deal of information and that have stayed involved by sending me their objectives and suggestions of the concrete measures that need to be taken to develop a national strategy. I also thank the many volunteers and the families in ridings across Canada that want to help seniors and improve their quality of life.

I want to comment on something that was said earlier about the Conservatives. If we look at the Conservatives' track record, we see that nothing got done over the past 10 years even though there was a minister responsible for seniors. What then was the point of having such a minister?

[*English*]

The Conservatives increased the age for old age security from 65 to 67. That is their track record, and there has been no increase. We as a government have increased the GIS by 10% for the first time. This is the first time, and 900,000 Canadians are benefiting from that. This is the action we are taking.

We are putting together a housing strategy. We have palliative care and we have home care. We are taking steps to make that happen. I am really disappointed that the Conservatives feel that they do not want to support that. It is very interesting that they are doing that.

When we look at our budget in 2016, we see we have done more in one budget than the previous government did for seniors in 10 years. Let us put that on the record.

I am really happy to be looking at getting the seniors motion in place. I will just mention statistics. The Canadian Medical Association has the Demand a Plan campaign. They are putting that in place, and 55,000 Canadians are asking the government to put a seniors strategy in place. In the last two days leading up to today's debate, I have received over 1,200 emails from Canadians asking how we can establish a seniors strategy.

There is a need to set up a seniors strategy, and all members in the House of Commons will have an opportunity to vote in the next little while to put a national seniors strategy in place. I ask all members of Parliament to look at the needs of seniors and to look at how we can put in place a strategy that will meet the needs of our aging population.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, the National Seniors Council, which is mentioned in my motion, is critical to fostering collaboration and dialogue about a national seniors strategy.

I thank those of my colleagues who supported the motion. We will keep the conversation going and move ahead with the development of a national seniors strategy.

● (1925)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I declare the motion carried on division.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to defend my private member's bill, Bill C-350, a bill which would combat forced organ harvesting.

As many members know, there are certain countries where organs are taken from people without their consent. Sometimes these organs are cut out of a person while he or she is still living and without anaesthetics, screaming in pain as the person's body is cut apart. In many cases, organ harvesting is a form of further abuse, targeting members of persecuted religious minorities.

After more than 10 years of research, two Canadian lawyers, David Matas and David Kilgour, along with investigative journalist Ethan Gutmann, released a report which estimated that between 60,000 and 100,000 organs are being transplanted in Chinese hospitals every year, with the source for most of those organs being prisoners of conscience, primarily Falun Gong practitioners. This figure is much larger than the 10,000 the Chinese government has produced in its attempt, unfortunately, to cover up this gross violation of fundamental human rights.

Transplantation in China is a booming industry. The Chinese government has invested huge amounts of money into new buildings, new staff, and research and training in transplants. Given this massive capital establishment coupled with the high volume of transplants, the transplantation industry in China is built on not just the ready supply of available organs in the present, but also on an expectation of an indefinite supply of organs for the future. As such, we should greet claims by the regime that this practice has ended with severe skepticism.

In Canada right now, some members might be surprised to know that there is no law preventing Canadian citizens from going abroad, acquiring an organ which they know or which they should know has been taken without consent, and then coming back. This is a gaping hole, a case where the law has not kept up with emerging realities. Right now, there is no law preventing Canadians from participating

in or benefiting from this immoral use of human organs from involuntary organ harvesting.

I believe, as I have said many times, that Canada needs to be vocal in standing up for international human rights, and in particular for the rights of persecuted minorities. Even above that, Canada needs legislation which would define in Canadian law our opposition to involuntary organ harvesting in cases where it comes back to our shores. This really is a no-brainer and it should be a non-partisan issue.

In previous Parliaments a number of MPs have introduced bills aimed at countering forced organ harvesting, but unfortunately, they have not made it through the legislative process.

Bill C-350, which I have proposed, is the same bill as Bill C-561 put forward by former Liberal justice minister Irwin Cotler. David Kilgour, who I mentioned earlier, is also a former Liberal and Progressive Conservative MP. Credit is also due to the current member for Etobicoke Centre, who I know cares very much about this issue, who has seconded my bill, and who put forward a similar bill in a previous Parliament. It has been a pleasure working with him.

This legislation has always been a good idea, but it is particularly needed right now. Given escalating human rights problems around the world, and given the emphasis this government is putting on Canada's relationship with China, there is a real urgency to move forward with this kind of basic human rights legislation.

Some people have asked me how often it actually happens that Canadians go oversees to get organs. While it is difficult to know the exact numbers, the report done by Kilgour and Matas found that of three Canadian hospital studies, they knew of 100 Canadians who had gone to China for organ transplants in the last three years. Those are some relatively significant numbers, which certainly have had a major impact on those political prisoners of conscience who are affected by this.

Further, I will mention that Israel, Spain, and Taiwan have all taken similar steps as are proposed by this bill. If Taiwan, which is very close to and much more economically linked with China, can take this step, then certainly we can as well.

I did not write this bill. I recognize the great work done on this issue by many people—Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats—but now it is time for us to take the football to the end zone. Notwithstanding any of the potential sensitivities, I believe that this needs to be done in this Parliament. It is an issue of fundamental human rights, so let us move this forward.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to discuss private member's Bill C-350, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (trafficking and transplanting human organs and other body parts), which was introduced by the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan on April 10, 2017.

This bill raises some complex legal and social policy issues. I want to point out that the House has contemplated these issues a number of times in the past decade. To be specific, a very similar proposal was introduced in the House on February 5, 2008, with Bill C-500, and again on May 7, 2009, with Bill C-381. A virtually identical proposal, Bill C-561, was introduced on December 6, 2013.

[*English*]

Our government condemns the underground trafficking of human organs, which so often victimizes vulnerable people in developing countries and under totalitarian regimes. There have been disturbing reports, as has been mentioned by my hon. colleague, of organ harvesting operations in recent years, all of which are extremely troubling. While the actual transplanting of illicitly obtained organs does not appear to be occurring within Canada's borders, we know that some Canadians have gone abroad to purchase life-saving organs due to a global shortage in organs for legitimate transplantation purposes. This practice is sometimes referred to as transplant tourism.

Bill C-350 proposes to create a number of new Criminal Code offences that would criminalize most people involved in the illicit trafficking of organs. The bill places particular emphasis on the recipients of illicitly obtained organs and would also criminalize those who assist purchasers, medical practitioners who take part in the transplantation of illicitly obtained organs, and any intermediaries who facilitate the transplantation. Those who sell their own organs are the only players who would not be directly criminalized, likely due to their vulnerability. The bill would allow Canada to extend extraterritorial jurisdiction where a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada commits any of these offences abroad.

Bill C-350 also proposes regulatory reforms that would require the establishment of a specific Canadian entity to monitor legitimate transplantations. It would require medical practitioners who examine a person who has had an organ transplanted to report the identity of that person as well as other health information to this proposed new entity. As part of this regulatory regime, the bill would impose a duty on the person who receives an organ to obtain a certificate establishing that it was donated and not purchased.

Currently in Canada, organ trafficking is prohibited by Criminal Code assault laws, given that removal of an organ without the informed consent of the patient constitutes aggravated assault. The Criminal Code provisions regarding accomplices and accessories after the fact also apply. In addition, the Criminal Code prohibits human trafficking under section 279.01, a related but distinct form of criminal conduct. The human trafficking offences can be enforced extraterritorially, but the assault offences cannot. Provincial and territorial regulatory laws governing legitimate organ transplantation also apply. They require informed and voluntary consent on the part of the donor and prohibit buying and selling organs. Transplanting organs outside of this regulatory framework constitutes a regulatory offence. Regulatory offences are generally punishable by a fine and/or a maximum of six months' imprisonment and cannot be enforced extraterritorially.

● (1935)

[*Translation*]

Basically, Bill C-350 would—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I am sorry, but the parliamentary secretary's time is up.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for giving a detailed summary of some of the context and some of the provisions of the bill. He is quite right in that it applies an established principle that when it comes to fundamental human rights, it is important for us to think in terms of extraterritorial action and extraterritorial jurisdiction.

I want to be very clear that I am open to amendments to this bill. We need to pass this through to committee. There is a lot of detail in it. The detail is important for ensuring that there is effective administration of the provisions that are in place, that we are actually not just saying that we are against organ harvesting, but we have a mechanism in place to address it concretely. I look forward to the work that the committee would do on this if we are able to pass it through to the committee.

The member did not say, and maybe this was part of the section that was cut off at the end, but maybe he will be able to assure us tonight that we can count on the support of the government at second reading so that we can move this important initiative forward again, which was initially proposed by Irwin Cotler, a former Liberal—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I want to assure my hon. colleague that the government is taking a hard look at this bill, without making any comment about what our position will be at second reading.

There are a number of complex issues that are raised by this proposed legislation specifically related to the extraterritoriality provisions, which would capture Canadians travelling abroad. In addition, there are other international implications, including under existing United Nations conventions as well as the Council of Europe, which has adopted its own convention against trafficking in human organs. These are all international treaties and conventions, which we will be looking at very closely as we approach the second reading vote.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank Cystic Fibrosis Canada for giving us all these beautiful yellow roses to wear today. They are still all over the House at this hour. We are thinking of the victims, survivors, and their families.

I am here tonight to follow up on a conversation I was having with the Minister of Status of Women about Canada's response to violence against women.

In 1995, Canada was ranked number one on the United Nations gender equality index. Today, Canada ranks 25th. As the Feminist Alliance for International Action notes, in the past 20 years, Canadian women have gone backward. A big part of that are the levels of violence that women and girls continue to face in Canada. Statistics Canada says that rates of violence against women remain largely unchanged over those two decades.

Here are some terrible numbers. One million women report having experienced sexual or domestic violence in the past five years. Women are 11 times more likely than men to be a target of sexual violence. Sexual violence experienced by indigenous women is more than three times that of non-indigenous women. Women living with disabilities experience violence two to three times more than women without disability. Sexual and domestic violence costs our economy over $12 billion a year.

I know the government and New Democrats agree that this cannot stand. I really hope that the minister's representative will not, again tonight, just restate his commitment to changing things and his recognition of the problem, but that we talk about what we are going to do.

Almost a year ago, the former minister of status of women started a federal strategy to address gender-based violence. A year later, we still do not have a plan, and the government has been largely silent on the progress it has made on that plan.

The need for this is clear. Responses to violence against women across the provinces and territories are fragmented. Services are often inaccessible and inconsistent across Canada. The status of women committee heard this very clearly from dozens of witnesses last year. This has been a critique of the federal government for decades, including from the United Nations, Oxfam, and the coalition of more than 180 organizations that urged the previous government and this one to endorse the blueprint for Canada's national action plan on violence against women and girls. This government has failed to do that.

The government keeps announcing that the strategy will be released “in the coming weeks”. It said that on February 1, February 7, March 6, March 8, March 17, and March 23. On April 12, the Minister of Status of Women made a low-key announcement saying more in-depth details will be announced “in the coming weeks” as the strategy takes form. Again, it is in the coming weeks. It keeps being said, but it has been months, almost a year. The government is asking women to wait again, and that is not fair to victims. It is not what victims and survivors need or want. We need clarity from the government.

Will the government stop asking women to wait for weeks to come, and finally release its plan that will actually deliver safety to women in danger, and immediately act to make Canada safer for women and girls?

● (1940)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to participate in this adjournment debate with the hon. member, and to discuss the federal government's response to gender-based violence.

When it comes to addressing gender-based violence, the Government of Canada is taking a multi-faceted approach, and will invest $101 million in a gender-based violence strategy over the next five years. That is in the budget. It is concrete, and it will happen.

The federal government has also established a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It will examine, and report on the systemic causes behind the violence that indigenous women and girls experience, and their greater vulnerability to that violence.

To ensure that women and their families fleeing violence have somewhere to turn when they are in need, budget 2016 committed $90 million over two years to enhance Canada's network of shelters and transition houses through the construction and renovation of over 3,000 shelter spaces off reserve.

Those concrete measures are happening right now, I would remind the hon. member. An additional $10.4 million over three years was allocated to support the renovation and construction of new shelters for victims of family violence in first nations communities, a further $33.6 million over five years will support shelter operations on reserve.

Through Status of Women Canada, we are investing over $1 million for a project by the Canadian network of women's shelters and transition houses to examine the multiple roles played by the shelter sector in supporting women who are victims of violence. Project activities will inform the development of a five-year strategic vision as well as policy changes in the shelter sector, and again, I would remind the hon. member that these actions are taking place right now.

These actions underscore the federal government's commitment to addressing all forms of gender-based violence. I can assure the hon. member that we will be introducing our gender-based violence strategy in the coming weeks.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Madam Speaker, I will remind the member that “in the coming weeks” has been used since February 1, so can you give me a more specific date? Can you give the women of Canada—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Could the member please address the Chair?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Madam Speaker, could the member please give a more specific date, or how many weeks? Maybe that is a better question. How many weeks, because in the coming weeks has been said arguably for either a year or since February 1, and said repeatedly.

I will also note the money that the government's offer was just a fraction of what the front-line organizations have been seeking, so I do urge the member to continue to push for real results on the ground.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Madam Speaker, as I said before, one of the priority actions of the government is to develop a national strategy to address gender-based violence. We will be starting by getting our own federal house in order. We expect this to be released very soon.

To meet this commitment, we have done our homework by listening to Canadians. In fact, Canadians were engaged across this country, including experts, advocates, and survivors who shared their insights and experiences on this issue. Approximately 300 individuals from over 175 organizations participated in these meetings. Over 7,500 Canadians participated by providing further comments by email and an online survey.

The Minister of Status of Women also created an advisory council of experts on gender-based violence, and engaged with a number of members of Parliament, including the hon. member. Stay tuned, the gender-based violence strategy will be released very soon.

● (1945)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, on February 3, Althia Raj, in the Huffington Post, reported on a leak from a recent meeting. She reported:

> Several government sources, speaking to The Huffington Post Canada on condition of anonymity, said a decision to abandon the Liberals' election promise of making the 2015 election the last held under a first-past-the-post system was reached after a two-hour discussion at the January cabinet retreat in Calgary. Only one cabinet minister was opposed.

She added that the "Newly minted Democratic Institutions Minister strongly opposed a referendum, and her arguments persuaded some skeptics."

When I read that, two things struck me. First, this was the first time, and I actually wrote my notes down at this time, in 16 years as a member of Parliament that I had seen a cabinet leak. These things simply do not happen—cabinet leaks as opposed to leaks from caucuses. They are unheard of. Second, this was not one source leaking from cabinet, it was from two sources. The note I made to myself at that time was, "These things just don't happen. The note was not a single source, there were several. Several sources equals this was a deliberately approved leak, approved at the highest level." I noted as well, "This is a blow-by-blow description of a cabinet meeting."

This is very problematic. Cabinet leaks are strictly prohibited. They are confidences of the crown. The Manual of Official Procedure of the Government of Canada says on page 17:

> Meetings of Cabinet are secret...Any announcements after meetings are made by the Prime Minister at a press conference or by press release, or can be made by the responsible minister.

However, details of cabinet meetings are never made public. This is such a serious matter that if a minister resigns as a result of a discussion that took place in cabinet, the minister must actually seek permission to make public the grounds on which he or she has resigned. That is how seriously cabinet conferences are taken.

Let me quote from the appendices of the Manual of Official Procedure. This is the letter one would send if one had resigned:

> As I am bound by my oath as a Privy Councillor I do not feel feel I can properly justify the course of action I have chosen to follow [in resigning] unless His Excellency the Governor General releases me from this oath so that I may publicly disclose the reasons for my resignation as I gave them to Cabinet.

That is how seriously this is taken. In the case of this leak, this struck me as preposterous and so, on February 7, I asked the government House leader the following question:

> Given the existence of two anonymous sources, this does look like a coordinated effort to allow the Prime Minister to spread the blame for changing course [on electoral reform] to the entire cabinet. However, I could be wrong about the source of leaks. Therefore, has a Privy Council Office investigation been launched into these leaks from cabinet?

The response I got, which was most unsatisfactory, from the House leader was, "Mr. Speaker, no, it has not."

The question is, has an investigation taken place and why, if one has not taken place, should we believe anything other than that the Prime Minister himself is responsible for these leaks from cabinet?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can maybe provide some comfort by indicating to the member that today we have a Prime Minister who truly believes in accountability and transparency. We see that day in and day out on a multitude of levels.

On the issue of cabinet confidentiality, the member across the way does not have to provide a reading of the rules. We understand the importance of cabinet confidentiality, and I can assure the member that there has been no violation of cabinet confidentiality. The member might want to speculate, but it is all speculation.

At the end of the day, we understand the importance of cabinet secrecy, and there has been no violation of that secrecy. It is an important issue.

On the issue of electoral reform, there has been a great deal of debate, not only in the chamber but also outside the chambre. There were a fair number of individuals who were discouraged that we were not able to build overall consensus, but one should not be overly disappointed in the sense that the minister has brought forward another piece of legislation. The Minister of Democratic Institutions has done an outstanding job in ensuring that there will be a difference in future elections.

We have raised issues. We have listened to what Canadians have said. We appreciate the fact there was no consensus, but there are some areas where there has been consensus. Where we have seen it, we now have a Minister of Democratic Institutions who is acting on it. Let me provide a couple of examples.

We will recall that under Stephen Harper and the unfair elections act, the Conservatives tried to tie the hands of the Chief Electoral Officer in some of the things he could do. Under the current legislation, that is now being talked about, not only inside but outside the chamber. Bill C-33 aims to restore the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to educate and inform Canadians, especially young people, indigenous Canadians, and new Canadians, about voting, elections, and related issues.

Statistics Canada estimates about 172,000 electors did not vote in the 2015 election because of a lack of adequate identity documents. Madam Speaker, you were in the last Parliament when the Conservative Party got rid of the vouching system. This legislation reinstates vouching, because we want more Canadians to be engaged in voting in elections.

We will remember the voter information cards. I sat on the committee where the Conservatives said that people could not use voter ID cards. That did not make sense, and Canadians knew that. We now have a minister responsible for democratic reform who is putting some teeth in the voting card. Bill C-33 would allow people to use a voter identification card as a piece of ID. She is also forward thinking. Think about cybersecurity. That is very serious today and will be in future elections.

This is a government that is proactively engaged in looking at ways to improve our elections going forward.

● (1950)

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, the first 30 seconds of that answer was actually on the topic of the cabinet leak. The rest was on another topic.

With regard to that question, I will just say that the parliamentary secretary's assertion that a cabinet leak did not occur is obviously counterfactual. I quoted from not one but two sources, anonymous but authoritative Liberal sources, leaking specific blow-by-blow details of a cabinet meeting and who acted in what way and at what time. That is a cabinet leak. That is a cabinet leak that is prohibited by our manual of procedure, and it points, if nothing else, to the profound lack of professionalism in the government, to the unwillingness to follow long-established precedents, the way we do things, and to sort of designing a new Peronist populism on the fly.

I will stop there, but I am terribly disappointed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member says “anonymous”. In other words, there is no attribution to an individual or anything of that nature. It could be some third party, such as a brother, sister, or aunt. Who knows? It is pure speculation.

We understand the importance of cabinet secrecy, and the government follows and abides by it. We do not need to be told by the opposition that there is a third, fourth, or fifth person, whoever it might be, hiding in a closet or whatever. I can assure the member that we respect the importance of cabinet secrecy.

The reason I went on to other issues, which were still relevant to the issue the member raised, was because it was about electoral reform, and that is what I think Canadians wanted us to talk about, in part. Hopefully it puts the matter to rest, and the member will be able to sleep a little better tonight.

● (1955)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (2000)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2016-17

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in the main estimates, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair.)

The Deputy Chair: Tonight's debate is a general one on the votes under Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[*Translation*]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used for both debate or for posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least five minutes for questions to the minister. When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, in other words, how much time will be spent on the speech and how much time will be used for questions and answers.

Members should also note that they will need the unanimous consent of the committee to split their time with another member. When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, as that time counts toward the time allocated to the party.

[*English*]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language, and behaviour.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), consideration in committee of the whole of the votes under Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

The hon. member for Thornhill.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be using my full time for questions. Let me begin by thanking the ministers for their attendance tonight. While I and my colleagues will have any number of questions regarding line items in the estimates, we will also examine and question policies and performance, following the great parliamentary tradition of regressive grievances before the granting of supply.

I will first begin by asking the minister for an update on the Canada-China high-level national security and rule of law dialogue, specifically the discussions on the extradition treaty and transfer of offenders treaty sought by China.

Just to avoid any etymological or grammatical quibbling on negotiation or discussion, Oxford Canada tells us that negotiations in pursuit of an objective, or treaty, are in fact negotiations.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, as I have said in the House before, protection of human rights is an integral part of our government's policy and something I am personally, deeply committed to.

Let me repeat that Canada and China are not extradition partners, and there are no extradition treaty negotiations. I can say that I have engaged in no such talks. As with all cases internationally, our government is firmly committed to the protection of human rights, the rule of law, and due process.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, China believes it is in negotiation, and the intention of the statement was to pursue discussions with an objective of a treaty.

Let me continue with regard to China. I am wondering what specific messages, since the minister assumed her current post, have been communicated by the Government of Canada to China with respect to China's reprehensible human rights record: extrajudicial detention; torture; organ harvesting; and any number of other international, and certainly under Canadian law, unacceptable practices.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, the member for Thornhill began by commenting on comments by the Chinese leadership.

I would like to remind the member for Thornhill that I am paid in Canadian dollars and not in renminbi, so I will restrict my comments to the position of our own government.

As to human rights, we raise human rights at every opportunity when speaking to all governments, including the Government of China. As the member opposite knows, I am running out of time. The Prime Minister raised this issue both during our visit to China and when Premier Li was here. It is a core Canadian objective.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, China's new ambassador to Canada, Mr. Lu Shaye, is demanding that China be allowed to negotiate in all sectors of the Canadian economy but has bluntly said that security concerns about state-owned enterprises and human rights abuses are simply not up for discussion.

How have you responded to that messaging?

The Deputy Chair: I just want to remind the member for Thornhill that he is to address the questions to the Chair.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as the member for Thornhill and I are both former journalists, it perhaps leads to a more informal mode of discourse.

I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting the new ambassador from China. As I said before, human rights are core to Canada's foreign policy agenda. We will always raise human rights.

When it comes to all negotiations I take part in, what the other party says is not in any way equivalent to what Canada will put on the table.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, at least four Canadian citizens are currently in different sorts of detention in China today: Chinese Canadian billionaire Xiao Jianhua, who was kidnapped from his Hong Kong residence and transported to China and who has not communicated clearly and independently, freely, on his state and status; Sun Qian, a Falun Gong practitioner and a resident of Vancouver, detained since February; and two Canadians, John Chong and his wife Allison, detained for a year now in conditions in violation of international trade law.

We are accustomed to Global Affairs and the parliamentary secretary using privacy, and the interests of the prisoners, as a justification for no comment. However, in the recent release of unjustly held and tortured prisoners in China and in Iran, and I am talking about the Garretts in one case and Professor Hoodfar in another, while Canada welcomed these unjustly held and persecuted individuals back to Canada, there was not a single word of criticism for the absolutely unacceptable behaviour of their Chinese jailers and the government.

● (2005)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as the member for Thornhill knows very well, consular cases are among the issues that any Canadian government, certainly our government, and I, as foreign minister, take the most personally. These Canadians are often suffering extremely difficult situations abroad. I take extremely seriously my duty toward them.

I would like to thank the member opposite for mentioning the success we have had in some consular cases. In my view, a single Canadian detained abroad unfairly is one too many, and this a duty that all governments have.

It was quite a moving moment for us here when former prime minister Brian Mulroney spoke to a cabinet committee. He was thanked by one of my colleagues, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, for the work that Brian Mulroney's government did to secure his release. Prime Minister Mulroney then joked, “You could have at least run for the Conservatives.”

On the specific Chinese cases the member opposite mentioned, I am very personally seized of them. Ms. Sun, Mr. John Chang, and a number of other cases in China, and very much in Iran, are cases of which the department is seized. I am personally engaged in them, as is my outstanding parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, will the Government of Canada publicly support Taiwan's request for its traditional role as observer at the World Health Assembly? I say it in the context of no Government of Canada public protest or comment last year when China pressured ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, in Montreal, Canada, to have Taiwan excluded as a traditional observer and, in fact, pressured the organization to prevent a Canadian journalist of Taiwanese origin from covering that event.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, Canada has consistently supported Taiwanese participation in international organizations where there is a practical imperative and where Taiwan's absence would be detrimental to global interests. Indeed, as the minister of trade, I had the privilege of participating in a number of APEC meetings at which Taiwan, as an economy, was present and represented.

Global health is a global responsibility. Germs do not know any borders. We welcome participation from all civil society and the entire global community, including Taiwan. We all have a stake when it comes to the health of humanity.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, could the minister answer this question in the light of the continuing increasingly aggressive posture of the regime in North Korea? What, if any, contribution is Canada prepared to make to defend and protect the people of South Korea?

● (2010)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, we condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the ongoing provocative actions by North Korea, including its most recent ballistic missile tests. This is a blatant disregard for international law and it is a direct threat to international peace and security, very much including Canada's peace and security. I have discussed this issue with our international partners, including this week and including at the G7. Canada is a Pacific nation. We are very much engaged.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, does the minister believe that enough has been done by Canada to assist Venezuelan sick and and starving civilians persecuted by a dictatorial government and trying to get these essential medicines, food, and relief supplies to the people who need those supplies the most?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I was hoping the member for Thornhill, or someone, would ask me about Venezuela, because this issue is a very great priority for Canada and for me personally.

On April 3, I was very proud that Canada was able to co-sponsor an OAS resolution, calling on Venezuela to restore constitutional order and respect for democracy. Yesterday the Prime Minister met with Lilian Tintori and Antonieta de Lopez to discuss the situation in Venezuela and the detention of opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez. I cannot say anymore about it, but I have more to say.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, I have more questions on that subject.

This question is based on the fact that for the past year and a half, the Liberal government has dragged its feet on implementing Magnitsky style sanctions, in a global sense, not only against Russia but against other human rights abusers, quite applicable these days with regard to Venezuela. Given the unanimous foreign affairs committee recommendations to the government, could the minister tell us when the government will accept those recommendations and implement Magnitsky?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as the member for Thornhill knows, this is an issue of which I am very personally aware and focused on. Bill Browder, who is the initiator of many of the Magnitsky efforts worldwide, has been a friend for more than two decades. I am very aware of Senator Raynell Andreychuk's bill and also of the fine report by the committee. It was really great to have a report that had support of all members, from all parties, of the committee.

We have been studying that report closely and I will have more to say about it. We have another three hours and 45 minutes, and I will have more to say about it tonight.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, there were 13 recommendations in the report of the foreign affairs committee. I would hope, in the hours to come, the minister considers the government's position on accepting the other 12 recommendations in addition to what I seem to be reading with regard to her comment on the Magnitsky style of sanctions.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as I said, the committee's work on Magnitsky and international human rights really is an example that does not happen that often, but sometimes does in the House. I want to very much include the NDP in this. There were some areas, and I think Canadian values are probably one of those areas, where we were able to work together and achieve a strong result for our whole country and for the world.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, perhaps it is an example for the government to listen to other committees of the House, as well, in areas like electoral reform.

Could the minister tell us how many times Canadian officials have met with Iranian officials? What was the nature of these meetings? Is there a line somewhere in the estimates with regard to the allotment of financial investment in a new Canadian mission?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as we discussed, I believe, last week, and as we spoke about in the media, we have indeed had a trip by officials, Canadian diplomats, to Iran, principally to raise consular issues, as we discussed earlier this evening. Those are really important and I feel a real duty personally toward those people. As we discussed openly, I did speak to the Iranian foreign minister on the phone.

● (2015)

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, I would hope that the Government of Canada, in its talks with the government of Iran, will remember the concerns our government had for the security of our foreign service professionals when we closed that mission in 2012.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, we certainly do. I also want to pay tribute to the brave history of Canadian diplomats, including in Iran. I think we are all proud of Ken Taylor.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am thankful for the opportunity to discuss my mandate commitment, our government, and I hope to some extent our country's priorities in the world, and Global Affairs main estimates for 2017-18. I will be using my time to deliver some remarks and then take some questions.

The member for Thornhill spoke about the importance of parliamentary committees. I certainly I believe in that. I have already spoken about the great work done by the committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, As I bear continued responsibility for the Canada-U.S. economic relationship, I also want to acknowledge the great work being done by the committee on international trade. Its former chair is sitting across from me. We all benefit from having such great, experienced parliamentarians and committed Canadians.

[*Translation*]

First of all, I want to thank the Standing Committee of International Trade and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for their excellent work. Our government is a champion of human rights. In Canada and around the world, imposing sanctions for human rights violations is a hot topic, and rightly so.

Right now, however, no Canadian legislation exists to authorize sanctions specifically for violations of international human rights obligations in a foreign state or for corruption. Bill S-226, introduced by my friend, Senator Raynell Andreychuk, and sponsored in the House by the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, seeks to fix this problem.

This bill expands on the work of an exemplary Canadian, Irwin Cotler, whose 2015 motion called for sanctions to be imposed on violators of human rights. That motion received unanimous support in the House. The tireless efforts of the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre on this issue also need to be recognized.

Today our government is proud to announce that we support this important legislation. The question of how to effectively apply sanctions for human rights abuses and for foreign corruption was among the issues examined by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Our government is delighted to have the unanimous support of the committee members for a new tool that will enable us to impose sanctions for these violations and this corruption.

As hon. members are certainly aware, similar legislation received royal assent last month in the United Kingdom. The United States has also enacted similar legislation. This approach has also been debated in the EU Parliament. Human rights are a non-partisan issue, and I appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the opposition on this important initiative.

[*English*]

Our government is a strong defender of human rights. In Canada and around the world, the issue of human rights sanctions, and in particular the case of Sergei Magnitsky, have drawn strong interest, and rightly so. However, there is no current Canadian law that authorizes the imposition of sanctions specifically for violations of international human rights obligations in a foreign state or for acts of corruption.

Bill S-226, introduced by my good friend, Senator Raynell Andreychuk, and sponsored in the chamber by the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, aims to address this gap. The bill builds on the work of a great Canadian, Irwin Cotler, whose 2015 motion calling for sanctions on human rights violators received the unanimous support of the House. I was glad to be sitting as a member. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the tireless efforts of my friend, the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre, on this issue. Today, our government is pleased to announce our support for this important legislation.

● (2020)

The question of how to effectively apply sanctions for human rights abuses and foreign corruption was among the issues examined by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Our government was very encouraged to see unanimous support from committee members, many of whom are here this evening, for a new instrument to impose sanctions on human rights violations or corruption. Our government supports expanding the scope under which sanctions measures can be enacted under the Special Economic Measures Act to include cases of gross violations of human rights and foreign corruption.

As hon. members are surely aware, last month comparable legislation received royal assent in the United Kingdom. The United States enacted a similar law in 2012, and this approach has been debated in the EU Parliament. I truly believe this is the direction the world is going, and it will send a strong message to the world that we are able to work in a non-partisan fashion together to advance this important legislation. We hope it will receive unanimous support when it comes to a vote in the House.

I will certainly work hard for that, and I really want to thank members on both sides of the House for their hard work. We know this has not been an easy issue to support, and I am sure there will be some objections, but we as Canadian members of Parliament can be united. Together, we will advance Canada's resolute defence of human rights at home and abroad, and advance our national values.

Let me now turn to my mandate: restoring Canada's constructive leadership in the world, promoting our values and interests, and ensuring Canada makes a meaningful contribution to global peace and prosperity. Through our progressive international agenda, we are strengthening our credibility and influence, contributing to a more just and inclusive world, helping to make the world safer and more secure, and contributing to a more prosperous world for Canadians and everyone else. There is more work to do.

Today is International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. I was very pleased to announce earlier today that Canada will seek to co-chair the Equal Rights Coalition, a group of 33 governments committed to promoting and protecting the rights of LGBTQ2 people around the world. One of the coalition's recent priorities is addressing the deplorable human rights violations against gay and bisexual men in Chechnya. Canada has led on this issue since we spoke out publicly on April 15, and I want to assure hon. members that our government continues to be very deeply engaged in this specific issue, and I am personally very involved.

Abroad, we have taken a feminist approach to our foreign policy and international assistance, providing significant support for sexual and reproductive health rights, including abortion, which I know my beloved colleague will discuss this evening at greater length. Our leadership on key international issues has also been evident on the environment. Together with my colleagues, Canada has been implementing significant contributions to the Paris agreement, and I want to note that at the recent meeting of the Arctic Council, which I attended, I personally was glad to see that the Paris agreement was mentioned in that shared declaration. That was important, as was climate change.

In the realm of international security, our government is implementing a strategy for security, stabilization, and humanitarian development assistance for Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Of the $1.6 billion allocated in budget 2016, $1.1 billion is dedicated to humanitarian assistance and development programming. Again, we will hear more from my colleague about that later tonight. Through our strategy, we are making meaningful contributions to the region. Another significant contribution is our welcome of more than 40,000 Syrian refugees to Canada, something that all Canadians can be proud of, and is really a distinctive contribution of Canada to regional security, Europe's security, and investment in the future of our great country, to which immigrants have contributed so much.

In eastern Europe, we have recently extended Operation Unifier in Ukraine. Canadian women and men in uniform are leading a multinational NATO battle group in Latvia. Canada values NATO's role as a critical contributor to international peace and security, and we view NATO as the cornerstone of North Atlantic security and defence policy.

● (2025)

One of our closest NATO allies is, of course, the United States. As all Canadians would expect, our government has made it a priority to build a relationship with the new U.S. administration. Since the election, we have been focused on engaging with our counterparts on how to collaboratively grow our economies and support our middle classes.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, the minister had an opportunity to begin to speak about the importance of the Canada-U. S. relationship, and the work that Global Affairs Canada and all Canadians have undertaken to ensure that relationship remains strong. Could she speak in further depth, and perhaps finish her thoughts on what level of work has gone on between our two countries, and what Global Affairs Canada has been doing as it relates to Canada and the U.S.?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, the parliamentary secretary spoke about the work that Global Affairs Canada has been doing. When it comes to engagement with the U.S., this truly has been a non-partisan effort. All Canadians appreciate the absolute importance of that relationship, very much including the economic relationship.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the members of this House on the opposite side of the aisle for joining with us, which was very much led by the outgoing leader of the official opposition, who has done a terrific job. I believe we have been able to work well together on this file, and that is really important.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, as our minister has said, our government has certainly been unequivocal in its support for Ukraine. We are a steadfast ally, and the minister has personally reiterated this to Ukraine's president and foreign minister. We know that our countries have had deep historical ties for more than 125 years, and that today there are over 1.3 million Canadians of Ukrainian descent. Our government support is seen in our shared values, our commitment to democracy, to the sanctity of borders, and of course to the support of the international rule of law.

This government has continuously moved forward the relationship with Ukraine. Last year, we signed a Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, a landmark agreement essential to the generation of new opportunities for Canadians and Ukrainians by improving market access, and creating more predictable conditions for trade. Ukraine offers numerous opportunities for Canadian businesses and investors in areas such as information and communication technologies, agriculture, infrastructure and logistics, aerospace, defence and security, and energy.

In addition, the extension of Operation Unifier until March 2019, announced by our Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence on March 6, is essential to deterring aggression, and helping provide a more secure and prosperous country. Operation Unifier is Canada's contribution to support Ukrainian forces through capacity-building, and coordination with the United States and other countries who are providing similar training assistance.

Our government stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukraine. Operation Unifier, is a critical piece of our multi-faceted support for Ukraine. Through Operation Unifier, our brave men and women in uniform are providing valuable military training, supporting Ukraine's defence of its sovereignty in the face of Russia's illegal occupation. By announcing the extension of Operation Unifier, and the deployment of Canadian troops to Latvia as one of four framework nations of the alliances to enhance forward presence in eastern Europe, Canada's message is loud and clear.

Canada is a friend and steadfast ally of Ukraine. Whether it be through support for the Ukrainian national police or by signing a free-trade agreement with Ukraine, our government is committed to the people of Ukraine.

Could the minister elaborate on what more Canada is doing to help the people of Ukraine defend their country, strengthen economic ties, and ensure Ukraine's territorial integrity?

● (2030)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, this is certainly another area where there is support from all sides of the House, and I want to recognize the work of the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman in particular, who has been a strong supporter of Ukraine and Ukrainian Canadians for many years.

I think we will be seeing some support for Ukraine in this House tomorrow, which is *Den Vyshyvanka*. A lot of us will be wearing our *vyshyvanka*. I will be wearing mine. Tomorrow, we will have a leading Ukrainian politician here, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. A lot of us will meet with him.

We often talk about Ukraine as something of interest to Ukrainian Canadians. However, it is very important when it comes to the invasion of the Ukrainian territory and its annexation by Russia to understand that this is a grave violation of international law. This is a grave—

The Deputy Chair: Unfortunately, the time is up.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Chair, I thank the ministers for being here this evening. I will use my speaking time to ask questions. However, I would first like to point out that I am encouraged by the government's decision to take steps to impose sanctions for serious violations of human rights and acts of corruption.

I hope that the government is also willing to implement the other recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in order to strengthen implementation of existing sanctions.

I would like to begin with another matter. The human rights violations perpetrated by certain mining companies operating abroad are damaging to Canada's international reputation. A report released in October 2016 by the Justice and Corporate Accountability Project entitled *The "Canada Brand": Violence and Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America* describes more than 400 incidents of violence at Canadian mining sites in the past 15 years in Latin America alone. This issue is about human rights and Canada's reputation, and as such warrants the Minister of Foreign Affairs's consideration.

The Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability together with other civil society organizations published model legislation showing how the government could consider creating the position of extractive industries ombudsperson.

Can the minister promise today that her government will appoint an independent, impartial, and credible ombudsperson to monitor the overseas activities of Canada's mining companies?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Chair, we are subject to your rules and, if you agree to allow me to respond to my colleague on this important issue, then I will.

Obviously, we expect all Canadian businesses abroad to conduct their activities responsibly and to respect human rights.

I thank my colleague for raising this important issue because I recently met with representatives from Amnesty International and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, and we talked about those issues.

I want to assure my colleague that, on my last visit to Chile, the first thing that I did was to meet with people from UN Women to learn about Canadian mining operations in that country. It is something that I take very seriously. Every time the opportunity presents itself, I remind Canadian companies that the government expects them to follow the strictest rules on corporate social responsibility, and I will continue to do so whenever the opportunity arises.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, as I was saying earlier, this issue is also about human rights and Canada's reputation. I would like to know whether the Minister of Foreign Affairs is also involved in this file and whether she will also hold meetings on that issue.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, of course I am very involved in this file. This is a very important issue, and it is just as important to me now that I am Minister of Foreign Affairs as it was when I was the minister of international trade.

● (2035)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, I am concerned that the government side seems to think that this is essentially a trade issue, because it is much more than that.

[*English*]

That being said, in February, the minister released a statement on illegal Israeli settlements, expressing Canada's deep concern by the expansion of settlements. Nowhere in the statement was any concern expressed about demolition of Palestinian homes, or relocation of Bedouins, to name just a few examples.

What concrete actions is Canada proposing to prevent illegal Israeli settlements, which we know are an impediment to a two-state solution and an impediment to peace?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, my answer to the previous question may not have been clear. I want to be very clear that the issue of the behaviour of our mining companies abroad is one I take very seriously as Minister of International Affairs. I referred to my past role as minister of international trade, simply because when I held that portfolio, I was also deeply engaged in the issue.

I want to assure the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie that this is an issue we take very seriously. My colleagues in other portfolios in the department take human rights very seriously as part of their work.

Going back to the very first point, I was very glad to hear the member for Laurier—Sainte Marie speak of her support for Bill S-226. It is good that we now have support from all three parties in the House. I am also aware of the other elements of the committee's report. I am looking at those—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, apparently the minister does not have enough time to answer. I did not get an answer about the promise to create an independent, impartial, and credible ombudsman. I am going to let that go for now because there is not much time.

I will ask my question again: What concrete action is Canada taking to prevent illegal settlements in occupied territories, which are an impediment to the two-state solution and an impediment to peace?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as my colleague said, our government has already released an official statement on this. As a steadfast ally to Israel and a friend to the Palestinians, Canada is committed to supporting peace in the Middle East. We are committed to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace, which includes the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

We support the peace process, promote security and the rule of law, stimulate sustainable economic growth, and provide humanitarian aid.

[*English*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, will Canada abide by UN Security Resolution 2334 on Israeli settlement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the opportunity to continue to speak more about our policy in the Middle East. As I said, we are a steadfast ally of Israel, and we are a friend of the Palestinians. We are determined to support peace in the Middle East.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, for lack of a clear answer, I would like to repeat my question.

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2334. Is Canada going to abide by the UN Security Council resolution?

● (2040)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for continuing that line of questioning, because I had not finished my answer.

We are committed to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state, living side by side, in peace and security with Israel.

We support the peace process. We promote security and the rule of law—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, clearly there is no answer as to whether the Government of Canada will or will not adequately respond to a resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council. That is a new one. I will move on to another topic.

[*English*]

About the ATT, the bill that has been tabled to implement the ATT still does not include the military export to the U.S.A., which is a problem. One other big problem is that the assessment criteria for export permits are not strengthened in Bill C-47, as is the intent of the ATT. In fact, the government backgrounder that accompanied the bill suggests that standards for assessing export will be listed in a new regulation following royal assent of Bill C-47.

Why did you table a bill that puts such a vital part of the enacting legislation in the regulations and not in the legislation proper?

The Deputy Chair: I want to remind the member to address her questions to the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, in this informal environment, I think I can speak for all my colleagues in saying we feel we are much more in a committee room and sometimes it is quite easy to dispense with the formalities of the House, so I do not mind.

I want to thank the hon. member for raising the question of the Arms Trade Treaty. As the hon. member knows, we made a campaign commitment to join this treaty, and I was very pleased that, at a time when we are working hard to pass a lot of legislation, on April 13 we were able to table legislation for Canada to accede to the Arms Trade Treaty, something previous governments had not done.

The Arms Trade Treaty can set a real global standard for trade in weapons, and can thereby help prevent human rights abuses and protect lives. It is something we are very committed to, and I look forward to working hard with the hon. member on ensuring both swift passage of that legislation and that all of our legislation meets the standards of that important international treaty. We believe in multilateralism.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, we have seen human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia, and we have seen very serious allegations of war crimes by Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

If the minister were to receive requests for approval of export permits today, would she approve export permits to Saudi Arabia?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I think in general, as the foreign affairs minister, it is not a wise practice to answer hypothetical questions. However, I would like to remind the member opposite that her colleagues are clearly on the record as to what they would do.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe said during the campaign, "We don't renege on contracts. It's a signed contract and we will honour that contract." I suppose that position from the hon. member is—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, I would like to know also how many export permits the minister has approved since she took office. It will not be possible to get it right now, but would it be possible to get a list of all the countries for which she has approved export permits?

● (2045)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I have just consulted with my deputy minister, the excellent Ian Shugart, who is sitting here with me. According to my recollection and his, we believe I have signed no export permits, but we will take that under advisement and we will double-check; we have a few hours, but that is what we believe to be the case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Chair, since I am running out of time, I want to come back to my first question.

Can the minister promise us today that her government will install an independent, impartial, and credible ombudsman to monitor the activities of Canadian mining industries?

[*English*]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, on arms, I cannot resist quoting the leader of the NDP who said, "You don't cancel a commercial accord retroactively. It's just not done."

I think I have spoken about that in our commitment to corporate social responsibility at some length. I am personally committed to it, as is the government. I do not want to tread on the territory of my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, and he will speak about that further.

[*Translation*]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am very pleased to be here this evening.

[*English*]

I will be speaking for about 10 minutes, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister gave me a very clear mandate as Minister of International Trade to increase Canadian trade and attract job-creating investors to Canada by expanding the economic opportunities offered to all Canadians. I am proud to say that the government has made significant progress on that front, but a lot of work remains to be done.

[*English*]

There is a growing recognition that when it comes to international trade, business as usual is no longer an option. Many people, especially those working hard to join the middle class, feel that trade and globalization have not worked for them. In response, we have options: protectionism, the status quo, or we can rethink the method, form, and function of free and fair trade in the world.

This government believes that we can do better. It is trade that has helped build this country into a top 10 global economy with the world's 30th largest population. With a population representing about 0.5% of the world population, we represent about 2.5% of global trade. I have been saying around the world that trade is in the DNA of Canadians, so for us, protectionism is not an option.

[*Translation*]

Likewise, the status quo is unacceptable. It is holding us back while others continue to move forward. Not only do Canadians rightfully expect us to keep pace with global trends in international trade, but they also expect us to actively participate in all trade programs.

If we do not seek the social licence to implement an ambitious trade program, we will succumb to the forces that oppose it.

[*English*]

To that end, our government is pursuing a new progressive trade agenda. At its most basic level, progressive trade is about ensuring that all segments of society can take advantage of, and otherwise benefit from, the opportunities that flow from trade and investment.

[*Translation*]

In concrete terms, this means that we will give more consideration to the interests and ambitions of smaller companies, especially those owned by women, young people, new immigrants, and indigenous entrepreneurs by bringing them to the forefront so they can realize their full potential.

[*English*]

To help Canadian jurisdictions attract global investment, we will be investing $218 million over the next five years to create the invest in Canada hub, a new federal body dedicated to attracting leading global firms to Canada to support middle-class prosperity by bringing good jobs, fresh capital, and new technologies to our economy.

● (2050)

[*Translation*]

We will also enhance our trade promotion support to Canadian businesses to ensure that they can take advantage of the opportunities created by trade agreements.

As Minister of International Trade, I play a leading role in promoting the benefits of trade with Canada as well as Canada's attractiveness as an investment location at the international level. In that sense, I consider myself to be Canada's chief marketing officer, of sorts.

[*English*]

Together with my officials in Canada's world-class trade commissioner service, I am pursuing four parallel avenues of action.

First, I am engaging with Canadian firms, especially small and medium-sized businesses, to encourage their participation in international trade while cultivating relationships with our major long-standing exporters responsible for the bulk of our exports to ensure we are aware of their trade development priorities and any market access concerns. At the same time, I am reaching out to high-value foreign investors to promote Canada's attractiveness as an investment location to the highest level within major international business.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, I am promoting Canadian capabilities in the most promising sectors, namely aerospace, the automotive industry, clean technology, the oil and gas industry, and forestry at major trade shows and trade missions.

My international commitment is also focused on key markets that present the greatest potential for Canada. Now more than ever is the best time to diversify our markets. This includes high-growth emerging markets as well as established trade partners, especially those with whom we have free trade agreements.

[*English*]

Finally, as far as our progressive trade agenda goes, I will be communicating with Canadians to sustain support for the global trading system here at home and to promote awareness of the benefits of trade and investment for Canadians, Canadian businesses, and Canada's economic prosperity. As the so-called chief marketing officer, the Prime Minister has instructed me in his mandate letter to increase the support provided to Canadian businesses to take advantage of the opportunities that flow after trade agreements are signed.

In other words, and my colleagues would join me in this, it is about making trade real for people. Trade deals for people mean better jobs for our middle class, more choice and better prices for our consumers, and a chance for SMEs to export around the world.

[*Translation*]

That is why Global Affairs Canada created the free trade agreement promotion task force, which is responsible for working with businesses in order to help them identify and reap the benefits of these agreements. The task force has mobilized business associations in order to come up with a new model for promoting free trade agreements so they can ensure follow-up.

Our priority is to promote the Canada-European Union comprehensive economic trade agreement, commonly known as CETA. I am delighted that Bill C-30 received royal assent yesterday, and I am pleased to point out that CETA should be provisionally in effect very soon.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the work of my colleagues and members of the Standing Committee on International Trade, who worked so hard to make this agreement a reality for Canadians. It took vision to begin the discussions over a decade ago. Today, all around the globe, it is the right agreement at the right time, not only for Canada and Europe, but also for the entire world.

[*English*]

We are also undertaking promotional activities to support other trade agreements, such as the Canada–Korea Free Trade Agreement, which came into force on January 1, 2016, and as my colleague, the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, was saying, the Canada–Ukraine free trade agreement, which is expected to be applied some time this summer. Once CETA is in force, Canadian companies will enjoy unprecedented duty-free access to a market of more than 500 million consumers and a GDP of over $22 trillion.

I often say around the world that Canada soon will have preferential market access to about 1.1 billion consumers. This is a fact that is noted around the world. We are becoming a bridge between the Pacific and the Atlantic. That, with our progressive trade agenda, is being noted around the world. Canada will be one of only a handful of countries that have guaranteed preferential access to both the U.S. and the EU, which together account for nearly half the world's economic output.

● (2055)

[*Translation*]

For most exporters, the most visible component of CETA is undoubtedly the elimination of tariffs in all sectors. Presently, only 25% of EU tariff lines on Canadian goods are duty-free. That number will rise to 98% as soon as the provisional application of the agreement takes effect and to 99% once all of the tariffs have been phased out. Over 9,000 tariff lines will be duty-free when the provisional application takes effect. This will create opportunities for people in the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and across the country, including the territories. All Canadian communities will benefit from this agreement, the most progressive agreement Canada and the European Union have ever negotiated.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Chair, last year the former minister of international trade worked extremely hard on CETA. Her parliamentary secretary travelled from coast to coast to coast to conduct consultations with Canadians.

This year the new minister and I have met with indigenous groups in Winnipeg, auto manufacturers and furniture importers in Toronto, women business leaders from Montreal, and lobster fishers in Atlantic Canada, for example.

Canadian businesses of all sizes and in all sectors across the country are poised to take advantage of the EU market of half a billion customers. Can the minister please tell the committee and Canadians how CETA would benefit middle-class Canadians and their families?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I would like to thank, first, my parliamentary secretary, who is doing an outstanding job, and again, take a bit of time to thank colleagues on the other side of the aisle. This is a whole of Canada effort that, as I said before, will benefit Canadians across our nation.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank publicly the former minister of international trade, now our distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs, for her extreme leadership, leadership that was needed, leadership at a time when we needed to make sure we put CETA back on track.

As I said before, Canadian exporters will benefit. Canadian consumers will benefit. Canadian workers will benefit. This is a good agreement for both Canada and Europe.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Madam Chair, we know that a lot of focus is on Europe, with CETA, and also on the Asia-Pacific and fast-growing markets like China, Japan, and India, but there are also markets in the south where the government could develop beneficial trade relations. The Mercosur group, formed of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, is a good example of these countries with which we could pursue a free trade agreement.

In 2011 and 2012, under the previous government, trade talks on Mercosur began, but unfortunately, they stalled. It was great to see the leadership of the Prime Minister when he visited Argentina in November and spoke about the importance of renewing trade talks between Canada and Mercosur. The four members of Mercosur have a combined GDP of $3.2 trillion and a population of 260 million. Bilateral merchandise trade between us totals nearly $8.1 billion. We are very glad to see leadership on this file and a path forward.

I wonder if the minister would explain how a formal free trade agreement with Mercosur could benefit Canada's middle class.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, there is no doubt about the ambitious trade agenda Canada has today. There has never been a better time to be Canada and to be ambitious. We have the social licence to have an ambitious trade agenda, because we invested in Canadians, we invested in middle-class families, we invested in infrastructure.

However, when it comes to Mercosur, I will just highlight how it is important. That is why we launched public consultations. We want to hear from Canadians across the nation and hear about the benefits and the challenges they see.

Mercosur, for those watching at home, and I am sure there are many, comprises Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay. This is an amazing market of 260 million people, with a strong middle class.

We are not only looking to the Atlantic, we are also looking south. We are looking at the Pacific alliance, and we are also looking at the Asia-Pacific.

My job as the Minister of International Trade is to make sure that Canadians across the nation have access to the most important markets in the world.

● (2100)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Madam Chair, tomorrow is Vyshyvanka Day, uniting Ukrainians all over the world.

Would the minister tell us how the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement will bring us closer together?

[*Translation*]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

As the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned, the bonds between Canada and Ukraine are those of friendship. We are connected not only through personal relationships, but also through the free trade agreement that was recently signed by the Ukrainian president and is currently going through the stages of our Parliament and democratic institutions.

I would like to reiterate that trade can be a force for good in the world. We are making an effort to promote human rights in Ukraine and help that country, but signing an agreement like this shows that trade can be a force for good because it gives Canadians and Ukrainians the opportunity to work together in a more beneficial way.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank members for the kind comments about the foreign affairs committee. I think we have done some good work. I also want to recognize the chair, the member for Kenora, who has done an exemplary job chairing the committee.

I am going to ask questions and get responses in my 15 minutes.

My first question is for the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie.

Earlier this year, *The Globe and Mail* had an article written by Robert Greenhill, entitled "Canada is not back when it comes to global aid— [as a matter of fact] it's far back.

He stated:

> ...the first Liberal budget actually had lower support for development (26 cents per $100 of national income) than the average of the Harper government (30 cents). On this track, the [Liberal] government will end up with the worst commitment to development of any Canadian government in the last half-century....

Considering the statistical facts, does the minister still think Canada is back when it comes to international development?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for the question.

Absolutely, I believe that there is no doubt that Canada is back on the world stage and on the international development scene. We conducted a major consultation over the past year, and 15,000 people from 65 countries took part. Most of the participants were Canadian, of course.

People asked us three things. Naturally they asked us for more money and a more direct contribution, but they also asked us for leadership and good policies. We have already demonstrated our leadership on several occasions. I will give just one example, that of the global fund. Through that fund we brought together our international partners and raised $13 billion to put an end to tuberculosis, malaria, and AIDS. They asked us for good policies. I look forward to presenting in the House my new policy, which will be focused on women and girls.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, I thank the government for the commitment to the global fund. It is something this side of the House supported and I think it is something we can all support. I think they do a good job, so I am thankful about that.

The member talked about the international assistance review. I know it is part of your mandate letter that the government will look at consulting. I know you have been consulting. You have also talked about releasing a report, yet we have not seen anything. It is hard for us to hold the government to account if we do not actually know what commitments are being made. I know there has been a lot of rhetoric on the commitments to the most vulnerable people. When will the government release the international assistance review?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we go to the minister, I want to remind the hon. member to address his questions through the Chair and not directly across the floor. I know it is kind of a nice collegial atmosphere, and it is not hard to go across the floor.

The hon. minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we are indeed finalizing the international development policy for release before the summer. I will summarize into three basic points what we heard during all these consultations and what will be found in this policy. First, we have human dignity and human rights. Then we have the emancipation of women, which is an extremely important issue. When we invest in making women agents of development and peace, that changes things. Finally, we have the importance of working with local communities and building up their means. These points that were brought forward during the consultations will certainly be reflected in the new policy.

● (2105)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, Canada has been a leader when it comes to maternal and child health. We have certainly been a leader on nutrition. We have been a leader on child mortality and on a number of other things. We have also led when it comes to accountability and transparency with our development dollars. We have always kept in mind that continued support for fundamental life-saving programs, such as global nutrition and vaccination, is essential.

In terms of new areas of focus and where the Liberals are going, I am hoping that we are going to continue to focus on the things Canada has developed an excellent reputation for around the world. We have seen the fact that the lives of children have been saved over the last number of years. Are there plans to divert funds away from global nutrition and vaccines?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I can assure my colleague that nutrition and vaccination are important components of our international aid policy. Actually, we are very proud of the organization that used to be called Micronutrient Initiative and is now known as Nutrition International. This is a Canadian initiative that we are very proud of and will continue to support. One of the programs we are supporting is the special project for the nutrition of adolescent girls.

With respect to vaccination and other major topics for which Canada is known, we will ensure that all of our partners find the best way to include women and strategies to empower them in their programs.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, there have been some recent announcements. I know that the minister announced $100 million in funding to small and medium-size Canadian organizations. It was announced earlier this year that there would be $650 million for sexual reproductive rights. Other monies have been announced. Given the fact that the budget has remained pretty constant or has actually decreased, which organizations will be losing out?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, my colleague will be pleased to know that we are continuing with the maternal and newborn child health initiative. In fact, we have enhanced it with that additional $650 million to make sure we look after the health of mothers and newborns together with all aspects of sexual and reproductive health. This is one way to get our existing partners involved and help them provide a broader range of services.

Regarding the $100 million over five years for small and medium-sized Canadian organizations, the goal is to establish a variety of partnerships. We also want to re-engage with Canadians because communication has been lacking there in recent years. One way to do that is to work with small organizations. We are targeting a certain kind of partner that will deliver projects that are in line with new policy priorities.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, my question now is around the DFI, the development finance initiative. With regard to that, can we expect shared ministerial oversight between trade and development, or which one will it fall under? It is falls under Export Development Canada right now.

If there is shared oversight, what types of communication and management mechanisms will be harnessed to enable policy coherence between development and trade?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, after conducting an in-depth analysis of the situation concerning the development finance institute, the DFI, we concluded that it would be best to establish DFI as a subsidiary of Export Development Canada in the interest of effectiveness and efficiency, given that EDC has expertise that we can leverage.

This Export Development Canada subsidiary will have its own board of directors and its own CEO, guided by a mandate focused on development. We know that Export Development Canada legally reports to the Minister of International Trade, but we work together and are complementary. I can guarantee that DFI's mandate is truly to ensure positive outcomes in development with private investment.

● (2110)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, will the DFI be guided by a mandate letter to formalize the authorization? When can we expect this mandate letter to be delivered to EDC?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I cannot say whether that will be outlined in a mandate letter, but there will be a well-defined mandate. We are currently in a period of transition and implementation. Certain directives have been issued. We will share more of that information on another occasion.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I must remind members that the Standing Orders stipulate that the answer must be the same length as the question. I know that this is not always easy, but it is something that members should perhaps consider.

The hon. member for Niagara West.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, my final question on the DFI relates to the $300 million, which is not new money but repurposed money. It is coming out of the operations of EDC. Is the $300 million going to be used for operations, such as salaries, or is it going to be used for loans and granting loans? If not, how is is going to capitalize DFI? Is it going to be through private placements or bond issues? What is the thought process to be effective?

Three hundred million dollars is a drop in the bucket, and quite frankly, I would hope there will be other ways to raise money to get this out. It is a very valuable tool. Our government put it forward. I am glad to see the Liberal government has also moved forward with it. It is a great tool in the tool kit when it comes to development.

My question is around the capitalization, because it is very important to determine what kind of effectiveness it will have.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we consider the $300 million to be starting capital. Over the years, we will have the opportunity to see how this new tool is working and the results it is producing. We have a lot of confidence in it.

The goal is to get the private sector interested in investing in developing countries and to make sure that those investments are made in keeping with all the rules and with the values that Canadians hold dear. We also want to ensure that these investments have a real impact on development. We therefore have to take the necessary time to assess the situation and determine whether to increase funding.

I also want to assure members that we are very committed to finding new funding mechanisms and engaging in financing innovation. I know I can count on the co-operation of our Canadian ambassador to the United Nations, who co-chairs a committee on financing sustainable development goals.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, I would like to talk a bit about UNRWA. I know it will not come as a surprise as we have talked about it in the House. Since November 2015, how much funding has the Government of Canada provided to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we renewed the general funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and are allocating $20 million to that cause, including $5 million specifically for humanitarian aid.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, what specific benefit to Canadian taxpayers does the government expect to gain for providing funding to UNRWA?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I would like to remind my colleagues that my mandate involves refocusing Canada's development assistance on helping the poorest and most vulnerable. There is no doubt that Palestinian refugees are among the world's poorest and most vulnerable. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is the only agency that provides humanitarian assistance to that group.

● (2115)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, I do not think anyone disagrees that the Palestinians need help and should receive it. I guess the challenge lies in what exactly UNRWA is doing and how it is delivering its aid.

I have the February 2 report from the UN Watch, entitled, "Poisoning Palestinian Children A Report on UNRWA Teachers' Incitement to Jihadist Terrorism and Antisemitism". I will read from the report. It is a teacher of UNRWA. I will read what his page says exactly, so we can take this out of theoretical and into the practical. It says:

> Good news to the Zionist settlers, choose your preferred method of death, and we will provide it.
>
> Run over, knife, screw, axe, hammer, choke, hang, skinning, cutting
>
> The offer stands until Palestine is free.

Is this really a good use of Canadian taxpayer dollars?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, once again, I would like to remind the House that this is the only United Nations agency helping Palestinian refugees. Since Canada renewed its funding to the agency, there has been a vast improvement in terms of follow-up and monitoring, including with respect to school books.

Our funding has paid for training for employees, managers, and teachers, and for background checks for employees in finance. We are following up on the school books issue. Our participation is making changes possible.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to be here to present the international assistance provisions in the main estimates. We have also accomplished many things in the past year. That is why I would like to share some thoughts on what we have achieved and our next steps.

My colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, already talked about planned spending on peace and security, climate change, and trade. The $6 billion allocated to international assistance this year includes sizeable contributions to development assistance and humanitarian measures.

[*English*]

Let me give some highlights.

The 2017-18 main estimates includes funding of $2.3 billion for the international development program. Through this program, Global Affairs Canada contributes to reducing poverty and inequality in developing countries, including in fragile contexts, through Canadian, international, and local partners. This year, Global Affairs Canada is implementing a new international assistance policy that protects and promotes the human dignity of the poorest and most vulnerable.

The empowerment of women and girls will be at the heart of Canada's new approach. Canada's international assistance will also support the achievement of the sustainable development goals as part of agenda 2030.

Through our assistance, we will also help developing countries transition to low carbon economies and adapt to climate change. To do so, Canada has committed $2.65 billion over five years. This year, $41.3 million will be used to target developing countries to help them address the impact of climate change through the climate fund for the private sector in Asia.

The 2017-18 main estimates further includes funding of $726.4 million for the international humanitarian assistance program. Through this program, Global Affairs Canada reduces the vulnerability of people in crisis situations, such as during armed conflicts, acute food insecurity, and natural disasters by providing timely and appropriate funding for food, water, shelter, protection, and other humanitarian assistance.

Canada also plays a key role in addressing the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. As part of our three-year commitment of $1.6 billion to the region, we will provide $200.3 million this year in bilateral development programming and humanitarian assistance to help address the crisis in Iraq and Syria. This funding will help those hardest hit by the conflict, by giving them access to food, shelter, health care, water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as protection and emergency education.

● (2120)

[*Translation*]

Our investments are linked to the mandate the Prime Minister gave me, namely, to refocus Canada's international assistance on helping the poorest and most vulnerable people, and supporting fragile states. To that end, our government has already begun a major shift, which specifically involves putting women and girls at the heart of Canada's new approach.

I would like to point out a few of our recent achievements that illustrate this shift. First of all, we ensured that our efforts in the area of maternal, newborn, and child health are evidence- and outcome-driven. That is why I asked our partners to include a full range of sexual and reproductive health services in their programming. This includes contraception, family planning, and safe and legal abortion services as well as post-abortion care.

In order to bridge the gaps that prevent women and girls from accessing these services, on March 8, the Prime Minister and I announced an investment of $650 million over three years. The programs that will benefit from this funding will help prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. They will also help support women's right to choose safe and legal abortions and access to post-abortion care.

Through our partnerships, we are also making Canada a leader in development in the area of innovation, transparency, and efficiency. In that regard, Canada was elected chair of the International Aid Transparency Initiative.

We are also working closely with the Minister of Finance in order to develop innovative funding mechanisms by creating new partnerships, especially with the private sector. In that regard, we have just launched the new development finance institute, which has a $300-million envelope.

In partnership with small and medium-sized companies, this institute will fund projects to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and foster women's empowerment, the ultimate goal being to reduce poverty.

In conjunction with this type of initiative, Canada is also engaged in supporting inclusive and responsible governance, peaceful pluralism, respect, diversity, and human rights. We will also be involved in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie in order to provide millions of youth with prospects that will help them integrate into and fully participate in society.

[*English*]

Canada recognizes that the global context for international assistance has changed. This is why we need to adjust our response accordingly. To do so, soon after being named Minister of International Development, I launched a review of Canada's international assistance, the most significant review in the last 25 years.

More than 15,000 people from across Canada and in more than 65 countries contributed to these consultations in person or online. We carefully reviewed all of the input we received and summarized what we heard in an online report last December. I can summarize this report in less than 10 words, in three points: human dignity, building local capacity, and focus on women and girls.

These consultations strengthened our willingness to adopt a feminist approach in development.

[*Translation*]

Over the coming weeks, I will have the opportunity to share with the House our new feminist international assistance policy. By all accounts, gender equality leads to significant and positive change for entire communities. This new policy reflects who we are as Canadians, an inclusive and open people ready to do our fair share.

We know that the time has come for a policy shift. Together with our partners, we have a collective duty to meet the international challenges that no longer know any borders because those challenges have an impact on the lives of Canadians. By working for a better world, by combatting epidemics or climate change, and by welcoming refugee families fleeing war and conflict, we are working for and with Canadians for a healthier, safer, and more prosperous world for future generations.

When it comes time to help women, men, and children faced with unprecedented humanitarian challenges, I believe that every party in the House shares the same values of compassion and generosity that compel us to play an active role on the international stage. Canada's international assistance is a vital tool that allows us to share these values and elevate and protect human dignity.

● (2125)

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the minister for her remarks. Obviously, the key message in her intervention was refocusing assistance on the poorest and most vulnerable, and more precisely, on women and girls.

The previous government's initiatives focused on mothers, newborns, and child health, MNCH, which I will be referring to in future questions. I would like to commend my colleague opposite for this initiative, because I think that we would all agree that it is really important.

I note that the minister has maintained this initiative, but she also mentioned the need to close gaps. Could the minister be more specific on how she has gone about closing these gaps?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I would like to start by thanking my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for her contribution to our effort to refocus international assistance. I also thank her for the question, which is very important to both of us.

Indeed, we recognize the importance of the initiative on maternal, newborn, and child health that we are pursuing. We have decided to broaden our commitment with an additional $650-million contribution for the three remaining years of this initiative to ensure that our partners can truly provide the entire range of sexual and reproductive health services, which includes sexual education for girls and boys, family planning, provision of birth control methods, legal and safe abortion, and post-abortion care. It is really important to us to continue with this initiative and provide the entire broad range of sexual and reproductive health services to this population.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Chair, I understand that the $650 million directed toward the sexual and reproductive health and rights commitment, or SRHR, will build on and address gaps in the previous MNCH commitment by protecting and promoting SRHR of women and adolescent girls.

What does the new funding seek to achieve, and what else is Canada doing to support SRHR?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, currently, 225 million women worldwide have an unmet need for modern contraception, and there are more than four million unintended pregnancies every year. Twenty-two million women and girls put their lives at risk annually by undergoing unsafe abortions. The SRHR investment will contribute to the attainment of SDG target 3.7, which is ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services.

We also want to help enable 120 million more women and adolescent girls to access contraception by 2020. Canada will also join the Ouagadougou Partnership, which aims to accelerate progress in the use of family planning services.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Chair, my question is for the minister.

We know that AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria are the leading causes of death in developing countries. These epidemics have a disproportionate impact on the world's poorest, but especially on women and girls, who are still the most affected by new HIV infections.

In 2014, tuberculosis killed 1.5 million people, including 480,000 women and 140,000 children. Currently, half the world's population is at risk of malaria. I would like to know what Canada is doing to fight effectively against these diseases. More precisely, how do we make sure that our efforts benefit the most vulnerable?

● (2130)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, Canada showed real leadership at the global fund's fifth replenishment conference.

We managed to bring together donor nations, private partners, and the countries that receive assistance but are an integral part of the fight to wipe out AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. We are very proud to have raised $13 million for this cause.

What is particularly interesting about the global fund is that it requires partner countries to invest in health systems in the developing world as well as to strengthen the governance of their own ministries of health. This has a double benefit. We are able to fight these diseases while improving governance in our partner countries.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Chair, how is Canada approaching the notion of increasing its partnership to attract new sources of funds for development issues?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we talked about Canada's development finance institute, which is a concrete example of the efforts we are making to encourage the private sector to contribute to economic growth within the developing world.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is indeed a pleasure to be on this side. I had the opportunity to be over there a couple of times when we were in government. I was thinking too, Mr. Chair, that if you moved up to this end of the table, we might not forget you as often as we do when you are sitting away down there. I will try to remember you.

Most of my discussion will be based around questions, but I might get off on a tirade every once in a while, so bear with me.

Before I move on to the trade files, I just want to drill down a bit further on a case that my friend from Thornhill brought up, the case of John Chang and Allison Lu. This is not a consular case, and I guess I say that with impunity because consular officials have gone to visit Mr. Chang only on a quarterly basis, every three months. It is basically a trade case.

The allegation is that he under-reported the value of the wine that he was bringing into China. He has been doing this for six years, so he knows the program. He is a Canadian of Chinese descent, so I guess they are reprogramming him more than anything else.

When the minister stands and talks about an integral part of all their discussions being due process, human rights, security, and rule of law, does that not apply then to Canadians who find themselves in these types of situations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I was hoping that the first question from the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster would be for me, because it is very rare that I disagree with my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, and rarer still that I disagree with him and agree with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. However, I must say that the Minister of International Trade suggested that very many Canadians were watching us all here tonight, and the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, *sotto voce*, suggested that perhaps more were watching the Senators. I popped out earlier and I can inform the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster that when I popped out, they were winning 4-0, which is fantastic.

We had a lot of discussion earlier about CETA, and I want to take this opportunity, with his first question directed to me, to thank the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster personally for the hard work that I know he did on that. Also, there is someone who is not here with us—I do not know if I am allowed to say that—but we should not talk about CETA without also acknowledging the hard work that the member for Abbotsford did on that agreement.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, I will let the minister know that the member for Abbotsford is in hospital today having an operation. He is all heart and he kind of wore it out in these negotiations, but he will be back up and around in no time at all. We know that.

Again, this case, as I say, is not a consular situation. It is based on some concerns on under-reporting the value of these 2,000 cases of wine, and somebody has absconded with them. The family has been working for over a year to try to get someone at Global Affairs to take this seriously. I have been trying for the last number of days and weeks, and I keep getting the same runaround. We get chased around and chased around. We cannot get through to this one, and this one will not return calls, so I can understand their frustration.

He has a court date a week from Friday, and we will never hear from or see him again if we do not intervene now. This is going to take a phone call to the new ambassador to China to say, "Get on your horse, go to Shanghai, and find out what is going on." There are allegations but never any real charges laid, but it completely contravenes a lot of the WTO agreements we have with China and, of course, the FIPA that we have signed. We can point to issues in there as well.

Will the minister take this seriously and make that call? It is 9:30 in the morning in Beijing. Take a moment, step out, call Ambassador McCallum, and get this under way.

● (2135)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster for bringing up this case. I am very seized of it. I absolutely am. I am very concerned about the situation of Mr. Chang. My officials are working hard on it as well. I am glad that the hon. member has brought it up. It is very important for us to focus on the status of Canadians abroad. I agree with the hon. member's characterization of the details of this case and want to assure him that we are working hard on it.

He has mentioned a friend of all of us, Ambassador John McCallum. He is doing a great job and working very hard. I am glad that the hon. member shares my confidence that Ambassador McCallum is a person we can rely on to advocate for Canadians in China, and that is what he is doing.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, maybe that is the test. If he can pull this one out of the hat, more power to him, and I will be the first one to say "great".

Mr. Chang is a personal friend. He has worked with us on a number of food shows throughout the Pacific Rim area. He is a fantastic guy who has done a great job. He has a winery in Richmond, another one in Kelowna, and he has just invested in one in the lower part of my friend's riding in southern Ontario. Their daughter is running everything now. She has not seen her parents for over a year, so there are some major concerns. We have less than a week to get this fixed.

We do ATIPs and we get a lot of redacted pages with things blacked out. One would think it was state secrets, and it is really not. One thing that was left in was a press release from when the Minister of International Trade was in Shanghai where all of this went down about two and a half months after Mr. Chang was arrested. I am wondering if she was briefed at that time. It is not uncommon, as I know from having been in those situations, for the consul general in Shanghai to provide a briefing. The consul general is now Weldon Epp, but at that time it was Rick Savone who would have briefed her. Was she privy to those discussions? Did she actually see what the allegations were from the Chinese government?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his concern about this issue. I promise to let Ambassador McCallum know that if he can pull this one off, the hon. member has now, in the presence of all of us, pledged to congratulate him.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: I will send him a bottle of wine.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I am not sure a bottle of wine would be something Ambassador McCallum would appreciate particularly, but praise or acknowledgement from the hon. member he certainly would.

I was indeed in Shanghai as trade minister. Weldon Epp was our terrific consul general there at the time. Some of our officials are here now. Weldon and all the officials in our department are absolutely terrific public servants. They do a terrific job of briefing visiting ministers on all the issues that concern them.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I want to remind the hon. members that this is broadcast, and any offers of any goods will be subject to the Ethics Commissioner.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, I withdraw the offer. I will drink the wine and tell him how good it was. I will not bother sending it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Gerry Ritz: I will move on to some of the trade files now. I will stay with China for just a moment. We had some very in-depth discussions with China, as well. We tripled our agricultural exports to China. There is a growing relationship with China.

I am a firm believer in trade with China on our terms and our timeline. I am wondering, now that the Liberals are moving forward a little more expeditiously than we did, whether they have already given assurance to China that they will give China market economy status.

● (2140)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that my colleague has a few questions for me, because we do work together very well.

I must say, with respect to China, as the member said, I am happy. I believe there are a few people watching us at home. The member said that he is a believer in what we can achieve in the Asia-Pacific region. We are doing that very much on our terms and on our timeline. As members know, we have started public consultations to hear from Canadians about the challenges and the opportunities that they see with respect to a possible free trade agreement with China. We are consulting widely, not only with Canadians, which is the right thing to do, but also with other nations which have trade agreements with China.

I can assure the member that any deal would be on our terms and on our timeline.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, that was a great response to a different question.

What I asked was whether the Liberals have already assured China that they will give China market economy status. That has been the prerequisite with China, with Australia, with anybody else who talks free trade with them. If we have already given that up, we have also given up the ability, then, to talk to China in a more stern way on steel dumping and things like that. It changes the whole dynamic.

Let us move on. He talked about the Asia-Pacific region. I totally agree with him. That is the growing market economy. Europe is a mature market. It is almost a family reunification situation working with Europe. However, Japan is the crown jewel.

The minister made mention of every free trade possible around the world, but he would not utter the term "trans-Pacific partnership" or "TPP". He tap danced better than Fred Astaire. If had a hat and an umbrella, he could put on a show here.

TPP is so important. It is a done deal. Japan has ratified it. They were the ones that were going to be really tough to get it ratified. They have done it. New Zealand has. Now, there is no reason at all that Canada is not leading that charge, along with Mexico, getting into the TPP, and putting more pressure on the U.S., as we get into these tough discussions on NAFTA.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I am very grateful that my colleague recognizes I could have some talent at other things.

One thing that I will say is that as my hon. colleague would know, let us start where it started.

I was in Chile, and what we achieved there was purpose, action, and ambition. The first thing we did when the minister met in Chile last time was to recommit to open, fair, and principled trade in the Asia-Pacific region. After that, we said action. We tasked our officials. My colleague would be happy to know that we took leadership.

I invited, on behalf of Canada, trade officials to come and look at options. That was the step on which ministers agreed. We needed to have our officials look at options. That is what they did here in Canada, in Toronto. We also had ambition. We all agree that we need to remain in the spirit of a progressive agreement, a comprehensive agreement, a modern agreement.

I am happy to report that our fine officials have had the chance to meet with other officials in Toronto, and that I will be leaving tomorrow for Vietnam with our great deputy minister to look at and consider a set of options. I can assure the member that whenever it comes to trade, Canada will be at the table. We will look at these options.

Canadians watching us at home understand that Asia-Pacific is the place we need to make sure Canada is present. We are very much a Pacific nation.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before I go back to the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, I just want to remind hon. members that the answer has to be about the same length as the question.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, it is a good thing that it is moving forward, but Japan is actually asking Canada to help it co-chair to help it lead this through. I know Australia and New Zealand are very much in favour of moving forward on this. The problem is Vietnam and Malaysia are being tugged back into the Chinese-Russia corridor and they very much want to start to come west and be drawn into our trade agreements.

Of course, then there is the whole ASEAN group of countries as well that we could build on, which might incorporate Indonesia and India, that are very reticent to move forward.

The other good news is South Korea. It is talking about joining TPP as well. That gets us totally up to speed with the Americans. Right now, we are two years behind in catching up on some of the tariff reductions. It is just a natural.

I am glad the minister is going to Vietnam. I am certainly going to seek assurances when we get back a week from Monday, after the break week. That will be one of the first questions asked: "Are we a done deal? Are we ready to go?" It is basically done; it just needs his signature on it to move forward. Let us get it through the House very expeditiously.

I want to change topics. There was a ruling by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal on drywall dumping into the country. It was actually the Minister of Public Safety, with customs officials, and so on, that sort of jumped the gun and slapped a heavy tariff on it, which caught a lot of reconstruction off guard, especially in Fort McMurray. Contracts had been let with hundreds of thousands of dollars on some projects. A hospital in Saskatoon was facing a $700,000 or $800,000 increase with this drywall tariff.

The CITT came out with a very good ruling on it with a set of standards it wanted met. The government has not measured up to any of those. I am wondering why it is so reticent to put those in play and actually get some of the contractors back to work rebuilding Fort McMurray and rebuilding a lot of that construction that needs to be done, but the drywall tariff is just killing them.

● (2145)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, my hon. colleague will be happy to learn that not only am I going to Vietnam, but I am also going on a trade mission after that with respect to softwood lumber. I will be in Korea, Japan, and Singapore, countries which very much matter.

My hon. colleague mentioned ASEAN. It is going to be a good opportunity again to engage with my Singapore counterpart to make sure we push the feasibility study that he knows the countries of ASEAN are undertaking to see whether or not we should pursue a free trade agreement between Canada and ASEAN. I have been pushing for that, and I will be redoing that when I am in the region.

He mentioned Japan. I am sure he will be very happy to learn that my counterpart even called me before the officials were meeting in Toronto. We have a very fine relationship between Canada and Japan. Actually, I speak French with my counterpart. Imagine, Canada and Japan do diplomacy in French. That is a first. Actually, we have a very close relationship. We will continue that.

I am very happy that my hon. colleague recognizes the importance of Asia-Pacific. I count on his support. He said it. Canadians expect us to have an ambitious trade agenda when it comes to the Asia-Pacific region. We are going to continue engaging, obviously.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will remind my colleagues on a playoff night that in a year from now, the Toronto Maple Leafs will be playing in the semifinals, so if the opposition wanted to convene a committee of the whole, perhaps we could all watch the Leafs playing at least in the semifinals.

I would like to use my 10 minutes for a speech followed by five minutes for questions and comments.

I am pleased to speak to the House tonight about how Canada's Middle East strategy has played an important role in shifting momentum against Daesh and in providing support to the beleaguered populations of Iraq, Syria, and their neighbours in the region.

Just over a year ago, our Prime Minister announced a new strategy to guide Canada's response to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and to mitigate the impact they were having on Jordan and on Lebanon.

Ours is a whole-of-government approach and one that reflects who we are as a country, one that stands with its allies, prefers lasting solutions to quick ones, and puts humanitarian ideals and the basic needs of people at the forefront of how we act in international affairs.

This strategy is comprehensive. It pursues military, diplomatic, security and stabilization, humanitarian, and development lines of effort. It also is an integrated strategy. It brings together skills, resources, and talents from across government, from the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, our diplomats around the world, and experts in development, humanitarian assistance, and counterterrorism.

Finally, our strategy is a sustained one, a commitment of more than $1.6 billion over three years. We have committed $840 million in humanitarian assistance to meet the basic needs of those affected by these conflicts. This comes to the aid of those who have been displaced, including those fleeing from the current fight to liberate Mosul, and it focuses specifically on the needs and the rights of women and girls.

We have also committed $270 million in long-term development assistance not only for Iraq and Syria, but also for Jordan and Lebanon, which are both struggling with the overwhelming demands of hosting refugees. The strategy's aim is to build resilience, helping to build communities that are strong enough to endure and overcome, and in the case of Iraq and Syria, prevent a slide back into conflict.

We are also committing $145 million for stabilization and security programming. This funding reinforces stabilization and reconciliation initiatives in Iraq, supports the peace process in Syria, and aims to reduce the threat of terrorist groups.

As members of the House well know, we have resettled more than 40,000 Syrian refugees since November 2015, who now proudly can call Canada home. The people of Syria deserve a life free from violence, and Canada will continue to be there to help them reach this very important goal.

The crises in the Middle East and the battle against Daesh present significant challenges to international stability and to the security of Canadians and Canadian interests. Our strategy and the dedication with which it is being implemented by members of our armed forces, police officers, and diplomats shows that Canada is certainly up to the challenge.

Let me now speak about the global coalition to counter Daesh, a coalition that consists of 68 countries and organizations from various regions around the world. With this coalition, we see that states all around the world share a common resolve for peace and stability and the fight against terrorism.

Our Canadian Armed Forces contribute to the global coalition through Operation Impact, which was recently extended by this government until June 2017. We are proud to be part of efforts which have liberated over two million people in Iraq and reduced Daesh's territory by more than 60% in Iraq and 30% in Syria.

Under Operation Impact, the Canadian Armed Forces conduct air operations, including surveillance and refuelling, provide training, advice and assistance to the Iraqi security forces, and provide capacity building to regional forces. Canada's contribution of 50 additional CAF medical personnel and support equipment to northern Iraq is a concrete example of Canada's ability to leverage expertise while complementing the work of coalition partners to maximum effect.

Underpinning Canada's military operations, we are supporting civilian-led efforts to prevent the flow of funding to Daesh and to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, including through the coalition working groups.

Canada is investing resources to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism. It is our view that addressing conditions conducive to violent extremism and terrorism are essential to combatting the expansion of Daesh. An overarching goal is to build better capacity of partners within the region to handle the current security challenges and to prepare them for new ones as they emerge.

● (2150)

Let me focus now on Iraq. I would like to speak about Iraq, and then I will transition to the Syrian situation. Canada supports a united, stable, and diverse Iraqi society. This has been our policy for years, and it is the backbone of our engagement and all of the programming that we see throughout the country. The promotion and protection of peaceful pluralism, respect for diversity, and for all human rights is an integral part of Canada's work in Iraq. A multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and inclusive society, Canada is well positioned to champion these values internationally by sharing Canadian experience and expertise.

We are also supporting the Iraqi government's efforts to mend ethnic and sectarian divisions, and to improve governance. This is why Canada's three-year strategy focuses on building local capacity at all levels, including Iraq's security forces and governance structures. Canada is certainly not alone in supporting the government and people of Iraq. We are working with the coalition to support Iraq's efforts to fight Daesh, hold Daesh members accountable for their terrible crimes, and provide a safe and stable environment for a diverse range of communities across the country.

We are also seeking to achieve some of these goals through the UN where we have called on the Security Council to take these steps to ensure that those responsible for the atrocities committed by Daesh in Iraq and Syria are held accountable. Daesh's actions are an affront to human dignity, international law, and to Canadian values of peaceful pluralism and respect for diversity. The atrocities perpetrated by Daesh have affected communities in Iraq, including the Shia and Sunni Muslim populations, Yazidis, Christians, and the list goes on unfortunately.

This is why our continued engagement in Iraq is so important, and why we created a multi-year strategy to focus on efforts in the region. As we move forward with our strategy in Iraq, we must remember that the international community is also working together to support Iraq, and by looking to global institutions like the UN, the coalition, and NATO, we can rally support and coordinate efforts.

Syria has witnessed six years of suffering and brutal violence. We are working tirelessly in collaboration with the international community toward a peaceful resolution of this conflict. the UN-led intra-Syrian peace process is the only true pathway for a sustainable, long-term solution to the conflict. Unfortunately, until the parties, notably the Syrian regime, meaningfully engage in the negotiations, the peace talks will not yield tangible results. We are persistent in our condemnation of the targeting of civilians, denial of humanitarian access, and of continued violence. Our position on these issues is clear, and it is consistent.

Canada has sought to exert pressure on all parties in this conflict. We have urged the ceasefire guarantors, in particular, Russia and Iran, to use their influence on the regime, to ensure ceasefire agreements are honoured, and humanitarian access is enabled. The Astana memorandum on de-escalation zones is certainly a welcome step toward the reduction of violence, but its success will depend on implementation and monitoring.

Canada closely follows the deplorable situation of human rights in Syria. It is entirely unacceptable that civilians, including humanitarian and health care workers, are deliberately targeted. We continue to condemn this violence in the strongest terms at the UN Human Rights Council and in other multilateral fora. Gross violations and abuses of human rights, including sexual violence, torture, and arbitrary detentions have no place in the world and any civilized society. Canada has to be committed to doing whatever it can to deal with these terrible atrocities. Indeed, we are fully committed.

When the Syrian regime shamelessly used sarin gas on April 4, we were steadfast that this heinous attack was a war crime. Canada welcomed the American targeted military response, and at the recent G7 foreign ministers meeting, Canada, along with other G7 countries, clearly stated that the use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated. We promptly took action, and added 49 names to our sanctions list against the regime.

Canada is a top contributor to the United Nations Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Investigative Mechanism. We fund international mechanisms that collect and document evidence in order to hold those who use chemical weapons, a clear war crime, to account in Syria.

● (2155)

Last fall, Canada played a leadership role by convening and focusing the attention of the UN General Assembly on the critical situation in Syria.

Let me ask the foreign minister two questions. The whole world was horrified by the chemical attacks that took place in Syria. Seeing images of the victims, including young children and infants, shocked all of us. Now the United States and some of our allies in the Middle East have called for sanctions against the Assad regime. Additionally, the United States took military action against the regime's airbase that was used to launch the attack.

I speak on behalf of many concerned Canadians who are hoping that such atrocities never take place in Syria or anywhere in the world. The Assad regime has repeatedly shown no regard for the lives of its own citizens, and continues to contribute toward a deteriorating human rights crisis in Syria.

Could the minister please tell us what actions Canada has taken in the aftermath of this reprehensible attack on innocent victims in Syria?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to start by thanking the member for London North Centre for his very hard work on these issues, and for his very eloquent remarks on these urgent issues this evening.

As the member has said, I fully support his characterization of the chemical weapons attack in Syria as a heinous war crime. As the Prime Minister said here in this House, the U.S. response, the limited, focused, targeted attack in response to the use of chemical weapons is something that Canada fully supported. That was the right thing to do, and we were very glad to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our ally in that action.

The member for London North Centre has asked what Canada has done further, and I am pleased to underscore that we added a further 49 names to the special economic sanctions list against Syria, and we have done a lot more.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Let me switch focus , Mr. Chair. Yesterday, the family of Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, was in Ottawa to speak to members of Parliament about the ongoing crisis in Venezuela. Lilian Tintori and Antonieta Mendoza de Lopez came to Ottawa to speak to us about their experience on the ground, and to call for the release of all political prisoners.

The Venezuelan opposition is calling for the restoration of constitutional order, and for the Venezuelan government to honour its international commitments to democracy and human rights. Canada has been a member of the Organization of American States since 1990. This organization has four foundational pillars: democracy, human rights, security, and development. These pillars are guiding principles for which the OAS continues to work.

Canada stands with its OAS partners in their concern over the crisis in Venezuela. Our government reiterated this when we spoke out with our OAS partners against the decision of the national electoral council to postpone the process of the electorate to activate a recall referendum. We also spoke out against the March 29 decision by the Venezuelan supreme court to suspend the legislative powers of the national assembly.

On April 26, Canada and 18 other countries voted to convene a meeting of all foreign ministers to consider the situation facing Venezuela today. As was reiterated by Ms. Tintori and Ms. Mendoza de Lopez, in their meetings in Ottawa yesterday, the OAS foreign ministers meeting provided an opportunity for hope to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

● (2200)

[*Translation*]

Can the minister explain how Canada is working with its regional partners to promote a sustainable solution for democracy and social stability in Venezuela?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question. Venezuela is very important to our government and our allies.

[*English*]

As my hon. colleague has said, we were privileged in Canada to have Lilian Tintori and Antonieta Lopez here yesterday. The Prime Minister met with them, and I do also want to recognize the hard work that our former colleague, Irwin Cotler, has been doing on this issue.

A very important point that was discussed yesterday that I would like to raise in the House is the detention of opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez. That is absolutely unacceptable, and I want Senor Lopez to know, and I hope he will hear, that all members of the House very strongly stand with him. This is an issue of great concern to Canada, and we are working hard on it.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will go on about a couple of topics here. I mainly have questions, but I will say a few things at the start. I would like to acknowledge the hard work that our ambassador in the U.S. has been doing this last little while. I have been working in the U.S. with my colleague, the parliamentary secretary. We have to acknowledge the hard work that Mr. MacNaughton and his staff have been doing down there. I want to make sure to highlight that.

I want to make the government aware of all of the work that the opposition party has been doing. On this file, we have actually not been an opposition party but working hand-in-hand. We recognize the importance of the $2 billion-a-day in trade, the nine million jobs, and what that means to Canadians. Not only have we been travelling to different parts of the U.S. with the trade committee, we have also been travelling to the governor's meetings together, and other types of events, where we can highlight Canada's interests in the U.S., and how that interacts with NAFTA.

When we talk about NAFTA, there is one thing to be aware of. We have been holding round tables right across Canada, in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Atlantic Canada, and Ontario, and will be doing more in Manitoba and Alberta, to get our companies to recognize that they need to engage with their customers and suppliers in the U.S., and with respect to how important it is to keep that border thin, and to not let any harm happen to that relationship. They get it. They have actually been talking about it. When I do my presentation, the first thing I point out is that this is a very non-partisan issue. They appreciate that. I look forward to working with the government as we move forward on this file.

There are a few questions that I will ask with respect to NAFTA that maybe the minister can clarify, because I know these questions are coming up.

When we are looking at NAFTA, instead of looking at it in a context of a bloc of North America, we should be looking at what we can do to make it more competitive in the world, more efficient, and more productive, and not in the context of, "What can I get from Mexico? What can I get from the U.S.", and vice versa. That concerns a lot of the business community, as that context is not appropriate.

I guess there is a lot of instability in the business community right now, because they are not sure what is happening with NAFTA, and the border adjustment tax would be another issue. If only we could just clarify some things. The first is with respect to the chain of command when it comes to negotiating NAFTA, because Mexico is involved. I know the parliamentary secretary works on Canada-U.S. relations, but I am not sure how the minister and the Minister of International Trade will be working together with respect to NAFTA.

Could she quickly answer that?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for Prince Albert for all for his hard work on this issue.

Like the member for Prince Albert, I would like to acknowledge that one thing Canada has done right collectively, with respect to this issue, is we have approached it in a non-partisan fashion. We understand this is really an issue for team Canada, and I really want to thank all the opposition parties for the way that we have been working together as a team on this key issue, not just the Canada-U.S. relationship but on NAFTA generally.

The member for Prince Albert spoke about all of the work that his party and the opposition MPs have been doing. I am the first to acknowledge that. Yesterday, the interim leader of the official opposition announced that she is moving on to a great new life. Maybe this is a good opportunity to also acknowledge the personal role that she has played with respect to leadership on this file. I spoke to her today, and she stated her intention to continue to be very involved. I am really glad to hear the praise for Ambassador MacNaughton, who I agree is absolutely doing a great job.

I have one final point on the bipartisan nature of our work that is worth underscoring, and the way it may be unprecedented in Canadian trade diplomacy. In addition to all of our parties working together, we are collaborating very closely with business and labour unions. I want to acknowledge those civil society actors, as well as the premiers and the mayors who are working so closely with us. A team Canada approach is the best way for us to really be successful, and I am proud of our country so far for having demonstrated that.

The member for Prince Albert asked how Mexico fits into the picture. I am pleased to answer very specifically. When it comes to the NAFTA negotiations, that is my responsibility. It is something I take very seriously. This is a really great and important trade agreement for Canada, and I promise all members of the House, and the member opposite, that I will work really hard to get a terrific deal for Canada going forward.

As the member opposite knows, NAFTA is a trilateral agreement. We are very much approaching the negotiations, and our mindset is very much on a trilateral deal. All three parties must be at the table. I am in close, very regular contact with both Ildefonso Guajardo, the Mexican minister of trade, and Luis Videgaray, the Mexican foreign minister, both of whom are engaged on this file. I will just say quickly that next week I am travelling to Mexico to meet with my counterparts there.

● (2205)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I have one more quick question on NAFTA because I have more questions on other issues. It is on timelines.

When we look at the elections coming up in Mexico and in the U. S. in 2018 and the talk around trying to have something completed this fall, could you give us an idea of the timelines involved in the negotiations? We have not even seen the 90-day letter come into the House in the U.S. at this point in time. Does the minister have any insight on that?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I want to remind the hon. members to state their questions through the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Randy Hoback: If you can actually ask her that for me, that would be great.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Is the Chair also able to answer on my behalf? That would keep you busy, Mr. Chair.

With respect to timelines, what Canada has said from day one is that we are ready to come to the table at any time. Something we can all agree on is Canada has the best trade negotiators in the world, and it will be a terrific team that goes to the table with us. We had a little back chat across the aisles. I do not know how allowed that is, but a question was asked about where Steve Verheul was. He is here and is working very hard, together with a great team at trade, on this issue.

As the member opposite knows, and I think all Canadians, as part of this process, are becoming real experts in the U.S. congressional system and TPA, the U.S. is bound by the TPA, which stipulates that negotiations can only begin after the 90-day notice has been given. I was in Washington on Monday and Tuesday and met with Secretary Ross and Ambassador Lighthizer. I was the first foreign official with whom Ambassador Lighthizer met. He said that was quite intentional. He wanted to show the importance of the key accords to Canada.

Although no one has a crystal ball when it comes to the world or the United States, now that Ambassador Lighthizer has been confirmed, I would expect the process will start to move forward.

● (2210)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I was in New Brunswick when the announcement came out on countervail duties. I actually was meeting with forestry producers there. They have a few questions they had asked me to maybe pass along to the minister.

One of their first questions is this. How many offers did the United States make to Canada to secure a new softwood lumber agreement after November 2015.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, when it comes to softwood lumber, the United States has made no offers that any Canadian would consider to be acceptable. I am absolutely certain of this. Where the U.S. right now is a level at which no member of the House, no Canadian province, no Canadian company, and no worker in the softwood industry would consider acceptable. We absolutely believe a negotiated deal is possible and desirable, but we want a good deal not just any deal.

I want to remind the hon. member that we have won at every trade tribunal, we have a strong hand, and we will not be reluctant to play it.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, what conversations has Canada had with the United States in regard to softwood lumber since November 2015?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the best way to characterize our conversations, both with Ambassador Froman and with Secretary Ross, are very extensive conversations around softwood lumber. I do not feel that any of those conversations from the U.S. side have yielded a sufficiently good basis for a really meaningful negotiation to take place. I want Canadians to know that we will never negotiate against ourselves.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I want to remind the hon. minister what the rules are. I am afraid I have to quasi-inform, to the best I can, that the answers can only be as long as the question is.

The hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, a report in the media from the former U.S. treasurer, Michael Froman, talked about how a deal was on the table and you walked away from it. Could you maybe highlight if that actually was true and what did we walk away from?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I just want to assure the hon. member that I did not walk away from anything. I am sure he meant the hon. minister

The hon. minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I apologize for talking for too long. I am very passionate when it comes to softwood lumber.

I believe the hon. member is referring to Ambassador Mike Froman who was the previous U.S. TR. Let me just put it this way. I have the highest respect for Ambassador Froman as a person. I actually knew him in my previous life as a journalist. However, when it comes to how different countries characterize negotiations, each country talks its own book. I will reiterate that we have not received, neither from Ambassador Froman nor from Secretary Ross, an offer sufficient for Canada to consider. I know the member opposite would agree with me.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, in Atlantic Canada, Irving has a 3% tariff and it did a volunteer submission. I talked to some of the producers there. They said that they were under the impression they could not do a voluntary submission, and then they were told afterwards.

Did Irving receive receive financial assistance from the government to do a voluntary submission? To the credit of Irving, by it doing the voluntary submission and getting that low rate, is there any way we can take that submission and apply it to the other companies in the Atlantic region?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, as the member opposite knows well, it is up to the Department of Commerce how it chooses to make its assessments. The Department of Commerce chooses which companies to assess and also chooses which companies' requests for a voluntary submission to accept.

I am pleased the Department of Commerce accepted Irving's request for a voluntary submission. As the member opposite suggests, the very low rate at which commerce has assessed Irving is an argument that I absolutely have been using in pointing out that even by the judgment of commerce, there is really no fare there for the U.S. to protest.

● (2215)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, I am sorry I am running out of time. I had more softwood lumber questions. However, I definitely want to talk about excise tax on beer, wine, and alcohol.

In the budget, we have an excise tax that has been increased, but we also have an escalator that kicks in every year, which increases the excise tax. How that relates to trade is in wine. For domestically produced wine, that excise tax is not collected. When we put the escalator in there, countries out of Europe are saying that if we are putting an escalator in there, we are going to create a scenario where Canadian wine now has an advantage over wines coming from other countries, Europe, U.S., whatever.

We had peace on that file before, but now that we have put the escalator in there, they are talking about coming after us and looking for some sort of compensation or some changes in that.

Has the finance department talked to you about this escalator, and have you done an evaluation on what the implications could be for trade?

The Assistant Deputy Chair : Once again, I want to remind the hon. member to speak through the Chair and not directly across the floor. I know it is very comfortable.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, the member for Prince Albert and I are friends and share a great interest in many things, including agriculture of the prairie provinces. I do not mind at all if he addresses me directly. I know those are not the rules.

I am, though, a bit surprised that the member opposite, particularly in the presence of his colleague, the member for Niagara West, some great wine country, would seem to be arguing the case for foreign wine producers against our own domestic industry.

Canada is a very open market when it comes to the sale of imported wines here. We are a terrific market for the United States. With CETA, we will be an even better market than we are today for Europe. Our foreign partners have no cause for complaint.

I am very proud of the great wines produced in Canada, and those are the ones I prefer to drink.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, maybe the member did not understand. I apologize. I want to clarify what I said before. The reality is because we have peace in the wine sector right now, with the excise tax not being collected, everything is okay. However, now that we have put the escalator onto the wines coming into Canada, that peace has been disrupted. Now we will be be facing trade actions, and the vineyards that had this advantage will now lose it, and that is unfortunate.

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am appearing tonight before the House of Commons committee of the whole to discuss the 2017-18 main estimates for Global Affairs Canada. I will be discussing trade opportunities and trade services in Canada.

In 2002, I earned an international trade designation, CITP, in Ottawa. Following my election in 2015, I was proud to be named to the Standing Committee on International Trade. I am honoured to represent the riding of New Brunswick Southwest. My riding borders four federal ridings in New Brunswick, as well as the state of Maine.

International trade and investments are crucial to inclusive economic growth, growing the middle class, encouraging innovation, and creating well-paying jobs in Canada and, more specifically for me, in Atlantic Canada.

The relationship between communities in New Brunswick Southwest and Maine is close and strong. For example, we share a mutual aid agreement for fire services and first responders. When there is a structural fire in New Brunswick Southwest, for example, in St. Stephen, the Calais, Maine fire department responds, and it is pre-cleared.

To date, I have held 17 town halls across my riding. At the most recent town hall in the village of McAdam, six miles from a U.S. border crossing, three Americans appeared out of interest. They stayed for the meeting and listened intently to the discussion, particularly the discussion on the risk of job losses on the American side if disruptions in trade between Canada and U.S. occurred.

At the end, they talked with me privately about how the end of NAFTA was incorrectly misunderstood in their communities as positively impacting economic growth. They were taking the discussion points home and sharing them with their friends and family members. They hoped to return for future town halls in my riding, and invite others.

As border MPs, we have a unique opportunity to include our American friends in our discussions. In my area, we see ourselves as one region.

This spring I hosted, with the St. Stephen chamber of commerce, a trade and opportunities luncheon. Almost 70 people attended. Presenting at the luncheon included, Export Development Canada, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Business Development Bank of Canada, Women in Business, Opportunities New Brunswick, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, and other area chambers.

We engaged in discussions about Canada trade services, on how we could help foster businesses, and help them grow through international trade. Our conversations focused on how our government could utilize our strengths of services and sectors to create new opportunities for Canadian businesses to connect business to business, and how our businesses could access international markets.

Fifty per cent of Canadian businesses are not exporting in its second year. I have heard from businesses in my riding that there exists a need to increase the awareness and promote the opportunities that trade can bring to micro-sized businesses, which have one to four employees, and small to medium-sized businesses as well. We need to work with these businesses and support their growth. Disruptions in trade with the United States will risk jobs on both sides of the border. Our American friends and neighbours I have spoken with are concerned, too, about jobs, growing the middle class, expanding opportunities for young people, and caring for seniors.

The Government of Canada is committed to inclusive economic growth, growing the middle class, encouraging innovation, and creating policies and programs to create well-paying jobs in Canada. This government is committed to expanding our trade relationships and has already given Canadian businesses access to more markets than ever before, whether through CETA, CUFTA, or our current discussions on NAFTA.

The opportunity to grow business on the international stage is profound, and Canada is in a place of strength to begin expanding our businesses internationally through trade. We continue to work with our American counterparts to strengthen and expand ties, and there exists a high demand for Canadian products and services.

Our government already has strong support services and well-integrated Canadian consulates. Many of our banks in Canada are fully integrated in foreign markets, and some are the strongest in the world. Canadian-owned businesses also benefit from an active Canadian consulate. These consulates work to promote businesses abroad.

Our government continues to emphasize a whole-of-government approach, which is why we offer services like the trade commissioner services. We see ministries and departments working together, whether it is innovation, science, economic development, international trade, foreign affairs, small business, tourism, immigration, refugees and citizenship.

● (2220)

We have a great, strong network in Canada of chambers of commerce. I remember in my early days of teaching international trade an excellent program, the export partnering program, that was federally funded in our area through ACOA. It would connect a busy business owner with a student either at a community college or a university. The student did the legwork and the homework the business owner did not have time to do. The success rate for those students and businesses in that engagement was exponential.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Trade have done outstanding jobs using these strengths in the Canadian system and working with our international partners to create opportunities. By signing and ratifying the Canada-European Union comprehensive economic and trade agreement, as well as the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, our government has given our businesses the opportunity to explore new markets through free trade.

Members of the Standing Committee on International Trade have heard from witnesses about the trade opportunities, whether it is the harmonization of standards; increased awareness of how trade will benefit citizens and businesses on both sides of the border; smart and more efficient border crossings, not the thinning or thickening of the border; the modernization of NAFTA; the possibility of pre-clearance for people and cargo, integrated law enforcement between Canada and the United States; and wraparound services.

Ratifying free trade agreements, with the best deal for Canadians in mind, is critical. We have more work to do to best prepare our young entrepreneurs, our micro-businesses, and our small and medium-sized businesses to take advantage of trade opportunities and supply chains. Therein rest many opportunities for businesses that want to grow through trade. We must ensure that our government continues to support and foster businesses as they begin to trade internationally.

One service that has helped businesses grow through trade is the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service, or TCS. The TCS assists Canadian businesses of all sizes in all sectors and in every region across Canada. The vast majority of Canadian companies are small, and the assistance trade commissioners provide is essential in helping them navigate the complexities associated with doing business abroad.

If I may share a funny story with the House, a few years ago, when teaching international trade, I recall a company that had contacted another company in Georgia. The person on the end of the phone in Georgia asked, “Are you registered with the virtual trade commissioner service?” The Canadian company said, “No”, and the person hung up. The Canadian company called back, the same question was asked, and the response was the same. The person in Georgia hung up. The Canadian company called back a third time and said, “Just hold it, I've registered”, and the person asked, “How can I help you?”

Turning to education, in 2014, some 338,000 international students generated $11.4 billion in spending, supporting some 123,000 jobs in communities in every province across Canada. The international education sector generated over $2.1 billion in tax revenue for all levels of government.

The TCS's EduCanada program, jointly developed with the provincial and territorial governments, complements the work of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to better attract and retain top student talent and allow Canada to compete with well-funded competitors, such as Australia and New Zealand, in this highly competitive sector.

The TCS helps communities and businesses prepare to enter international markets, assesses their likelihood of achieving success in their target markets, provides qualified local contacts, and gives advice and assistance in resolving business problems.

The TCS is well positioned to help Canadian businesses with its network of international business support services in more than 160 offices abroad and through five regional offices across Canada.

In closing, I would once again like to thank the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for their tireless work in promoting Canada's trade interests abroad while also working with Canadian businesses to best support them as they grow and trade internationally.

My first questions tonight are about finding solutions for stronger partnerships and about our bilateral and trilateral trade in North America.

NAFTA is a 25-year-old agreement that could benefit from upgrading and improvements to help North America be more competitive with other nations. Consider that when it was first negotiated, the Internet did not exist. We have a North American integrated supply chain. There is no trade-off between border security and efficiency in our integrated supply chain. What are the opportunities for greater integration of the North American supply chain? How can we better use technology to more efficiently, in terms of time and cost, pre-clear our cargo and citizens?

● (2225)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to start by thanking the member for New Brunswick Southwest for her very hard work. I would like to tell her, through you, Mr. Chair, something I have not told her directly. Her story about the very close cross-border integration in her community is one I shared just yesterday with Senator Susan Collins of Maine. She told me that she grew up 20 miles from the Canadian border and is also very familiar with towns where hospitals, fire departments, and schools are shared across the border. That is a very important story about the Canada-U. S. relationship, and I really want to thank the member for telling that story so eloquently.

When it comes to NAFTA, as the member said, it is indeed good practice in trade to update and modernize trade agreements. We are currently in the midst of updating our trade agreements with Chile, with Israel, and with the EFTA countries. It is simply what is done. In fact, when it comes to NAFTA, by our count, there have been 11 significant modifications to this very important agreement since it first entered into force, so we very much welcome the opportunity to modernize the agreement. As the member suggested, the whole e-commerce Internet space is certainly one area ripe for some positive advances.

● (2230)

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Mr. Chair, I also have the opportunity of sitting on the status of women committee. Currently, we are studying the economic security of women. We frequently hear from witnesses that to improve justice and empowerment for women, women need wraparound services, such as financial literacy, role models, financing, and strategies to grow their businesses.

Female entrepreneurs are significantly under-represented among exporting firms. How is the government helping female entrepreneur-led businesses to grow and benefit from trade opportunities?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I would like to take a minute to thank the member for New Brunswick Southwest very much. We say it is a whole-of-government effort when it comes to our trade relationship with the United States. I would like to applaud her work not only as a member of the trade committee but in her own riding. She shared her story, which is very powerful. The Minister of Foreign Affairs just referred to it.

She mentioned something. For those who are watching at home, I would like to take a moment to applaud the more than 1,300 trade commissioners who serve Canada so well in Canada and in more than 100 cities around the world. I want to take the chance, because some of them might be watching us, to thank them on behalf of the Government of Canada and all of us in the House, who I am sure applaud their work. They are helping—

The Deputy Chair: Sorry, your time is up.

The hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest.

Ms. Karen Ludwig: Madam Chair, the minister spoke earlier tonight of his role as Canada's chief marketing officer in both promoting Canada's exports to the world and in attracting international investment. There are, I am sure, several tools in the minister's toolkit he can use in these efforts, such as trade missions like his most recent trip to China to promote the sale of Canadian softwood lumber. Another tool, however, is Export Development Canada. EDC is a crown corporation within the minister's mandate, which is intended to help Canadian companies benefit from international business opportunities.

Could the minister tell us about EDC's work in helping Canadian businesses succeed on the international stage and about how important a tool this is for promoting trade?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I would like to thank all the employees of EDC, who are doing fabulous work around the world. Singapore is our new post outside Canada, and I will be there to salute their work and the work of all the employees of EDC in helping Canadians succeed.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be using my whole time for questions this evening.

The Minister of International Trade does not have the mandate for international aid responsibilities. Could the minister assure us that the development financing institute will be explicitly subject to the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. Yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, the Minister of International Development very clearly and eloquently explained how she and I work together when it comes to this corporation. Thus, I have nothing to add to my colleague's comments on this issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I am not clear if that was a yes or a no. I am looking for an answer as to whether the development finance institute will be explicitly subject to the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the mandate of the development finance institute will focus squarely on development. Its mandate will be directly linked to the act.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, the development finance institute will be owned by Export and Development Canada, and it suggests that the parliamentary budget officer will have no oversight of the DFI. Is this the case?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the parliamentary budget officer will have the same oversight as he currently does of Export Development Canada's other divisions.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I will move on to trade-related questions on NAFTA.

In a recent editorial, Ed Broadbent made the case that human rights should be at the forefront of a new NAFTA. He wrote:

> While job losses and the shift of income from wages to profits have been in part due to technological change, the latest report of the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook notes that global competition has also [contributed].... Together with the decline of unions, such competition has contributed to the marked rise in inequality within most countries around the world.

Does the minister agree that human rights, including environmental and labour rights, should be at the centre of trade deals, yes or no?

● (2235)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I promised myself earlier today, when the member for Essex introduced me to her parents, who are here, that I would recognize them. There may not be that many Canadians watching us tonight, but I bet those two Canadians are and are very proud of their daughter.

Our government strongly believes in a progressive trade agenda that very much includes environmental and labour rights and also women's rights. That is something we have been advancing in all our trade agreements. I see some real opportunities in NAFTA modernization to raise the environmental and labour standards.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, will the minister push for NAFTA's labour and environment side agreements to be brought into the main agreement, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, the NAFTA negotiations have not yet begun, and the 90-day clock has not started. I am very clear that I am not going to put all of Canada's cards on the table at this early moment, but I do want to assure the member opposite, and all Canadians, that I am very committed to strengthening—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, NAFTA includes an energy proportionality clause that requires Canada to guarantee U.S. access to our energy resources in perpetuity. If Canada does not negotiate this clause out of NAFTA, how could it impact on Canada's ability to meet our Paris climate commitments?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to very sincerely thank the member opposite for raising the issue of the energy ratchet clause. That is something I have been looking at closely with my officials. If and when NAFTA negotiations begin, I think that is certainly something—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I would like to read a quote from Daniel Ujczo, with the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance, who appeared before the trade committee on May 4 of this year. He stated:

> ...I think chapter 11 has no place in a new NAFTA. It doesn't make any sense for Canadians or the United States to have that. That was put in there for the Mexicans, no question about that. Reasonable minds can also disagree, or agree, on chapter 19.

Will the government ask for chapter 11 to be revisited, with the goal of removing it entirely from NAFTA?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me start with chapter 19. This is a very important chapter for Canada. We have all spoken a lot about softwood lumber, and the chapter 19 tribunals are a very important place for Canadian companies to establish their rights. That is going to be a strong Canadian position now and going forward.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, that was my next question, so I will go back to the previous question.

This dispute resolution in chapter 11 is a system that has worked against Canada's interests for the past 20-plus years. Will the government ask for chapter 11 to be revisited, with the goal of removing it entirely from NAFTA?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I have, for a long time, been clear that there are significant issues with ISDS provisions in many trade agreements, and the Canadian experience shows that. Having said that, when it comes to specific negotiating goals, we are going to keep our powder dry, just to the point—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, labour mobility is obviously a huge concern in my riding of Essex. We are down on the border. A lot of people who come from our region work and live in the U.S. What would the minister want to see happen with labour mobility in NAFTA renegotiations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, this gives me a chance to go back to the labour point, and I think the fact that Canada has now committed to ratifying this final ILO convention is a moment worth celebrating. That is something that we can support together, and it does show our government's commitment to labour rights and international obligations.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, many communities, including my own, are very concerned about the thickening of the Canada-U.S. border. Canadians know the importance of efficient, secure trade at the border because so many thousands of jobs depend on it, both here and in the U.S.

We also know that border infrastructure is woefully inadequate. I am very pleased that a new bridge is on track for my region of Windsor Essex. Communities across Canada are crying out for a better border infrastructure. What are the government's plans to improve border infrastructure?

● (2240)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I very much share the member's view that Canada and Canadians benefit from a border that is thin, a border that is easily crossed, a border that has very strong infrastructure. Our government is absolutely committed to building infrastructure and working in partnership with our American allies to facilitate crossing of the border, and I discussed that at some length yesterday and the day before in Washington.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, my next question has to do with softwood lumber. Jobs losses are starting and workers' paycheques are being slashed and their hours being cut in Canada already. What is the cabinet's plan to support Canadian softwood lumber workers and communities?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, on that question I am going to defer to my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, who has responsibility. We are working on a plan, and I know he will share it soon.

I do want to come back quickly to the labour mobility point just to say I strongly support—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I would like to flip over and talk about steel. I would like to know if the minister has discussed the unfair trade practice of Chinese steel dumping in Canada.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I have a lot of esteem for my colleague's work on the committee. Yes, I did raise that issue when I met with Chinese officials on my last trip to China.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, is the government going to grant market economy status to China?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, as you know, as part of our exploratory talks, we are still in the phase where we are consulting Canadians and consulting widely to see about challenges and opportunities that could be offered to Canadians when it comes to potential trade with—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I will ask that question again and ask for a yes-or-no answer, please. Is the government going to grant market economy status to China?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I will answer the question as I did before. We are consulting Canadians widely as part of our exploratory talks with respect to a potential free trade agreement with China.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, in the budget there is mention of modernization of our trade remedy system. It is called for widely, in particular since the executive order to tighten up the trade remedy system in the United States.

Could the minister speak to when we can expect to see these changes to the trade remedy system?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, as my hon. colleague knows well, this is under the purview of the Minister of Finance, but I am sure this is something that he is considering. As in anything with respect to trade, we will always work to make sure that it is in the best interests of Canadians across the country.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I will start speaking about China.

A free trade agreement with China would raise many concerns about how Canada addresses China's shortfall on human rights, environmental rights, and labour rights, as well as its record on currency manipulation and unfair trade practices of the kind I mentioned, such as steel dumping and overproduction.

I recently learned about the story of John Chang and Allison Lu. I know that the minister spoke about this case earlier. They are being held in administrative custody in China for an alleged customs violation.

China's heavy-handed response is incredibly troubling. How does the government see Canada moving forward on an FTA with China, as it seems the government is intent on doing, while addressing China's record on human rights and its demand for an extradition treaty with Canada?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, human rights are part of the core principle of our foreign trade. I would say the way I do that as Minister of International Trade is actually to promote our progressive agenda.

When I met with our Chinese counterparts, I did mention that when it comes to progressive trade, Canada is looking at the environment, labour rights, and gender equality. That is how we are promoting that. That is something I would say the Chinese side well understands, and we will continue to pursue that. That is our way to make a difference in the world.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I am pleased that he mentioned the progressive trade agenda, because I think it is something Canadians are curious about.

Can the minister share with us when there will be postings for Canadians to see what they mean by a progressive trade agenda?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I wish that my colleague would have got that by now, because what we mean by progressive trade is to make sure that those who have been historically under-represented in trade can participate. This is about women entrepreneurs. This is about indigenous people. This is making trade real for people.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, what I am asking is when the government will share that with Canadians. When will the government define that for Canadians, not for me here in the House?

● (2245)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, from a round table with indigenous people, with women in business, and with youth around the country, I think Canadians understand that very well.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, in 2016, international development assistance stood at a low of 0.26% of gross national income. That budget was frozen in 2017, which in fact is in further decline.

What is the government's plan for reaching the 0.7% that it is committed to?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, as you know, we have held a lot consultations over the past year. I can guarantee that our partners do not just want money from the Government of Canada. They also want leadership and good policies. We have shown great leadership with the global fund, and we will do so again on other issues. I look forward to presenting the new policy.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I would like to go to the TPP for a moment quickly, and ask if the government would commit to scrapping the previously negotiated TPP, as we entered into it very late into the negotiating phase, and if there is to be some form of trade that is being discussed right now, that we would start fresh with a new trade agreement under the new government.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, as I said before, when we last met in Chile, this was a meeting about purpose, action, and ambition. As for purpose, we recommitted to have principled open trade and free trade in this part of the world. As for action, we committed that our officials would look at options. That is why Canada showed leadership and hosted people in Toronto. We said we would maintain the high level of ambition.

As I am going to Vietnam, we will look at all options.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, can the minister commit that this will be a new trade agreement?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I am happy to report to Canadians that as Canadians would expect from the Minister of International Trade, I will look at all options.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I would like to go back to steel, because we really have been studying this in great detail at the trade committee. I would really like to hear from the minister an assurance that the government will get a commitment from China that China will stop unfair steel dumping in our country.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, as my colleague well knows, we are working with all major steel producing countries at the G20 and the OECD global forum on steel excess capacity to deal with the root cause of trade friction on global steel markets. I have raised that with our Chinese counterparts and will continue to do so.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Chair, I would like to ask the Minister of International Trade if he would agree that all trade agreements going forward should include human rights and environmental and labour rights entrenched into the agreements.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I am happy to report to this House and to Canadians who are watching us that a progressive trade agenda is the policy of the Government of Canada. It will always be there in our trade agreements to promote progressive elements in trade.

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be using 10 minutes for my speech, followed by five minutes for questions.

As we have said on numerous occasions, the Canada-U.S. economic relationship is balanced and mutually beneficial. Our economic ties to the U.S. are key to middle-class jobs and growth on both sides of the border.

Our partnership is also critical to Americans. Canada is the number one customer for U.S. exports and we are America's biggest market. Thirty-two states count Canada as their largest international export destination, with nine million U.S. jobs directly linked to trade with Canada. We do over $2.4 billion in trade a day, every single day.

We strongly believe that a whole-of-government and non-partisan approach is the best way to have an impact on American decision-makers and opinion leaders. That is what has happened in this Parliament, and we are all delighted. I will now speak about our key priorities.

[*Translation*]

At their first meeting in Washington, the Prime Minister and President Trump issued a joint statement that gave a clear indication of Canada's priorities in our relationship with the United States. The statement is a road map to upcoming co-operative projects between our two nations and it focuses on five key areas.

[*English*]

First, the growth of our economy, which includes such initiatives as co-operation on regulation. The Treasury Board Secretariat is leading an ongoing dialogue with American officials to move ahead with co-operation on getting rid of regulations that impede the flow of business. Another initiative is the Gordie Howe International Bridge. The Windsor-Detroit border crossing project is halfway through the bidding stage, and a private sector partner is expected to be selected next spring.

The second is promoting energy security and the environment. This focused area includes and identifies pipelines, and air and water quality. For pipelines, Keystone XL is now approved. The economy and the environment have to go hand in hand. There are several other projects like pipelines or electricity transmission lines that are at different stages for review.

When it comes to air and water quality, Environment and Climate Change Canada is working very closely with the U.S. and broad co-operation continues in some specific problem areas.

The third is keeping our border secure, of course. Entry-exit or, more specifically, Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Customs Act will allow for full implementation of the entry-exit initiative whereby Canada and the U.S. will exchange information on all travellers crossing the land border. We expect implementation by 2018. There will be a thinning of the border with a thickening of the outer perimeter of security.

There was also discussion of pre-clearance, namely Bill C-23, An Act respecting the preclearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States. Once the bill is passed, both countries will be in a position to ratify the agreement, which will provide a framework for expansion of pre- clearance to cargo. In other words, it will get stuff moving faster.

The fourth area of focus was working together as allies in the world's hot spots, which includes co-operation on NORAD, which of course is essential to our Arctic sovereignty, as well as dominance over our own air space, our military alliance with the U.S., not only through NORAD but also NATO. The steps for modernization are in the government's defence policy review. More news will be announced on that by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence shortly.

There is also the coalition to counter Daesh, wherein Canada is a key member of this 68-member coalition. The minister attended the ministerial meeting in Washington, DC, hosted by Secretary Tillerson on March 22, where the future strategy to defeat Daesh was clearly laid out.

We have also made some specific proposals and taken action to counter the activities, the heinous crimes of Daesh, not the least of which is supporting, through military efforts, but also $804 million in humanitarian aid, to assist the most vulnerable.

The fifth and last area of focus in this thematic scheme is empowering women entrepreneurs and business leaders. We oversaw the creation of the Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders. The council is committed to removing barriers to women's participation in the business community, and supporting women by promoting the growth of women-owned enterprises.

We are committed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and the promotion and protection of their human rights. We see women as powerful agents of change, an experience I, myself, have seen in the war-torn lands of Afghanistan. These individuals have the right to be full participants, and influencers in peace and security operations. Achieving gender equality requires changing unequal power relations, and challenging social norms and gender stereotypes. We can lead by example in that regard.

The next issue is with regard to the terms of the engagement strategy.

● (2250)

[*Translation*]

Since January 20, the Government of Canada and the provinces and territories have been undertaking an ambitious pan-Canadian strategy to get the United States involved. This includes not only the Prime Minister's official visit to Washington in February—I had the pleasure of going with him—but also visits, meetings, and other discussions between the ministers, parliamentarians, and provincial and territorial leaders and their American counterparts, as well as political leaders at the national and state level.

The ministers have undertaken an action-centred program that targets 11 key states whose main export destination is Canada and that maintain vital economic links with Canada or have a significant impact on American policy and Canadian interests.

We have already made over 100 visits as part of this effort. Twelve parliamentary committees are planning or preparing to go on visits to the United States in the near future, and I thank them for that. Through these visits, calls, and meetings initiated by Canada's network in the United States, we have obtained the support of over 215 political leaders in the United States.

[*English*]

Top of mind, of course, is NAFTA, something we have already talked about tonight. I know it has been said before, and we are going to say it again. We are ready to come to the negotiating table with our American friends at any time. It has been modified 11 times since its inception. It is natural that trade agreements evolve as the economy evolves. Canada is open to discussing improvements that would benefit all three NAFTA parties.

Should negotiations take place, and we all expect they will, Canada will be, and is, prepared to discuss at the appropriate time specific strategies, but we are not going to expose our cards right now. Quite frankly, we want a good deal, not just any deal.

When it comes to softwood lumber, on April 24, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced it would impose preliminary countervailing duties on certain softwood lumber products from Canada. We disagree strongly with the U.S. Department of Commerce's decision to impose an unfair and punitive duty. The accusations are baseless and unfounded. We continue to believe that it is in both our countries' best interests to have a negotiated agreement as soon as possible with a deal that is fair for both countries.

We have been in constant conversation with our American counterparts. The Prime Minister raises this every time he interacts with President Trump, as does the minister with her counterparts. As a matter of fact, the last time she raised it with her counterparts was yesterday. That is literally hot off the press.

While Canada is committed to negotiating an agreement, once again, we are not going to accept just any deal. We need an agreement that is in the best interests of our industry. We want a win-win.

In conclusion, while we only touched on a couple of the highlights of our engagement on this very broad, complex, and deep relationship, it is clear that the partnership between Canada and the United States has been essential to our shared prosperity. Our trade with the United States is balanced and mutually beneficial. We are its largest customer. We invest more in the U.S. than the U.S. invests in us. We are the Americans' biggest client.

We will also continue to work with all parliamentarians to ensure that we maintain a united front in our engagement with the United States in a non-partisan fashion. The growth of our economy and working well with the United States is not a partisan issue. All members of Parliament are thanked, essentially, for their "all hands on deck" approach.

Canada's relationship with the United States is extensive, highly integrated, and prosperous. Thirty-two states count Canada as their largest international export destination. Nine million U.S. jobs are linked to trade with Canada, and we do over $2.4 billion in trade a day. That is why from the very beginning, our government looked for ways to reach out to the new American administration to advance issues of mutual interest.

It is also important to realize that it has been really a non-partisan approach. I would like to single out, as the minister has done, the interim Leader of the Opposition, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland, for her fantastic work in Washington. I literally saw her in action now on two different occasions, once at the inauguration and once at another event involving the governors. She was on television. She was able to leverage her Rolodex of very impressive leaders in Washington itself. She was organizing her teams to actually get out there and interact with us. She dispatched a whole bunch of her members of Parliament down to pair off with their Liberal and NDP colleagues. Quite frankly, it was sterling leadership by example.

I would also like to single out the hon. member for Prince Albert, my opposite number, the critic. We have travelled to the United States many times. I find him knowledgeable, experienced, and once again a true Canadian at heart. It has been a pleasure to work alongside him.

I wonder if the minister would please outline her activities and elaborate on our engagement strategy with the United States at all levels and across all sectors.

● (2255)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I want to start by thanking my parliamentary secretary for his extremely hard work on this file. We can all agree that he has been leading an exemplary effort, particularly in parliamentary engagement. I certainly heard a lot of praise for his exceptional efforts when I was in Washington this week from both our own diplomats and our American counterparts. Therefore, I would like to thank him.

There was a bit of joking about the difficulty of the questions from my parliamentary secretary, so I cannot resist reminding the members opposite of a line that I think is attributed to Winston Churchill. Someone once said to him, looking across the House, that those were the enemies across the aisle, and he said, "No, those are my adversaries. The enemies are behind me." Of course, that is not the case in this House in either direction.

I want to talk a bit about what has really been an exceptional effort by us all to engage with our U.S. neighbours and partners. So far, we have engaged with 220 political leaders, including 11 U.S. cabinet members, 150 members of Congress, and over 35 governors and lieutenant-governors. I do not know how—

● (2300)

The Deputy Chair: Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Madam Chair, in 2016, bilateral trade between Canada and the United States totalled $672 billion in merchandise. Imports and exports of services totalled $125 billion in 2015. Last year, the United States' direct investment in Canada was $392 billion. These are huge numbers. The stock of Canadian investment in the United States last year was $474 billion. The bottom line is that Canadian companies invested more Canadian wealth in the United States than the United States invested in Canada. Therefore, not only are we its biggest client, we are also its biggest investor. That is a lot of money, and that of course is the way it is.

However, our relationship with the U.S. is more than just numbers. Can the minister elaborate on the advantages of a North American free trade agreement with the United States?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as we have just heard, Canadians have known for a long time that the parliamentary secretary is a fantastic soldier. We are now learning that he is a terrific salesman for Canada, and I think we should all be grateful to him for his eloquence, some of which we have just heard.

One of the things that we have all been spending some time talking to our American partners about is making sure they are aware of the depth and importance of the economic relationship with Canada. As Canadians, we all appreciate that we tend to think about the United States and are a little more aware of the United States than it is about us. That is what happens when we are one-tenth the size. As the parliamentary secretary has just mentioned, what really is surprising and gets the attention of Americans is pointing out that we are by far the largest client of the United States.

We read a lot and hear a lot in the U.S. media about China. However, the reality is that the single largest market for the United States is Canada. That is an important point to ensure our American partners appreciate, and something that I think all of us have been explaining very effectively on our many trips and engagements with the United States.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Chair, it is an honour to rise tonight in committee of the whole to delve into the main estimates and to question the cabinet ministers who are here with us tonight. I appreciate their being with us and taking the time to answer all our questions.

First, I have to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for her support of Bill S-226, the justice for victims of corrupt foreign officials legislation, the Sergei Magnitsky law, which I am sponsoring in the House on behalf of Senator Raynell Andreychuk of the other place. The minister has long had a passion for this, as someone from the Ukrainian community in Canada. I am proud of those same roots, being a Prairie Ukrainian kid off the farm. The bill is incredibly important for going after corrupt foreign officials.

The legislation really comes as a result of an individual by the name of Sergei Magnitsky, who was a lawyer working on behalf of Bill Browder in Russia. Unfortunately for him, he uncovered this incredible corrupt scheme of taxes and money laundering. He was falsely accused, arrested, tortured and murdered while in prison in Moscow. Bill Browder has taken it upon himself to raise the spectre of this problem.

As the minister has already said, this was a bill in the last Parliament. It received unanimous support and passed. Our former colleague Irwin Cotler brought forward the first version of the bill and I tabled a similar bill in this place. Senator Raynell Andreychuk has really taken it to a new level. She has gone beyond just corrupt foreign officials and those governments with human rights abuses against their citizens. It also goes after those individuals and governments that go after individuals based upon religion, ethnicity, sex and gender. These things are now in the bill, and I congratulate the senator for doing that.

The minister said that the government would be supporting Bill S-226, but with some amendments. I know we have chatted about this, but if there are going to be amendments, what type of amendments are we looking at? How will that change the flow of the bill coming through the House for expedient passage?

● (2305)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his hard work in general, but also very specifically on Bill S-226. The member has been working on this for a long time. This is really a special moment when we can come together in support.

I want to join him also in acknowledging the hard work of our colleague Senator Raynell Andreychuk. This is an example of not only cross-party collaboration, but also an example of the Senate and the House working together.

I want to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for joining me in celebrating the pioneering work of our former colleague Irwin Cotler, who has really been a leading voice on this. I am glad to be able to recognize him for that.

I also want to underscore that I was particularly glad to hear the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie also acknowledge in her remarks that she supported Bill S-226. To me, that augurs well for us getting the support of the whole House.

The member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman is absolutely right. I discussed with him just today the fact that there were some amendments, largely of a technical nature, that we would like to discuss with him. The cross-party support that was demonstrated in the committee's report and in our discussions today can really be carried through with some of those amendments.

We would like to discuss some technical amendments to make this work better. For example, as we know from problems we have had with no-fly lists, it is important that when someone is put on a list, there be some right of appeal. Believe it or not, government officials, even MPs, can get things wrong sometimes. I know that is astonishing. It is important to have a process that allows people to appeal.

There are some other technical amendments, but I do not have time to mention them right now. I would be happy to do so later.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I appreciate the information from the minister.

As the minister is aware, Bill Browder did a bunch of research into Canada being used as a safe haven to launder money from corrupt officials, including those in Russia. Recently he came out with a report that there were over 30 Canadian banks used by Russian shell companies to move over $20 million through our banking system.

When we get the Magnitsky law in place, will there be mechanisms in place and resources provided to the RCMP, CSIS, and other organizations to ensure that our financial institutions are not being used to hide away money that has been obtained through corrupt means?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I am very aware of the research which the member opposite refers to. I would also like to commend Canadian journalists. They have done a really good job reporting on this. They have captured the attention of a lot of Canadians and have made us aware in ways that many Canadians may not have been previously that our country also has been used as a haven for ill-gotten gains of corrupt foreign officials. That is something which no Canadian can support, and that is the reason Bill S-226 will have not only, I hope, unanimous support in this House, but also support across the country.

In terms of providing the resources to be sure that once we get the legislation in place we are able to act on it, I and the government have every intention of doing so.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I appreciate the minister's frank responses to the questions that are being asked.

Her predecessor, Stéphane Dion, was not always that forthcoming and sometimes offered answers that at times bewildered us in the opposition, as well as others in the Canadian media and the public's eye. He rejected the implementation of the Magnitsky law. He said he did not want to antagonize the Putin regime. He did not want to put in place any policies that would alienate Russia further, when actually it looked more like it was appeasement that the government was engaged in. He had a philosophy that he called responsible conviction. Part of this philosophy included the appeasement of Vladimir Putin and the Russian regime.

Now that the minister is in charge, and she has been doing a commendable job, is it still her department's policy to have responsible conviction as a framework for the government's foreign affairs policy internationally?

● (2310)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, through you, let me just say to the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman I am well aware that I have many flaws, as do all mortal people, but appeasement of Russia is not something I have often been accused of.

I do believe it is important for Canada to be able to have frank conversations with the Russian government. In Fairbanks, Alaska, last Wednesday and Thursday, I had the opportunity to speak with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, and I plan to continue to do so. It is important for Canada to have a voice and to speak directly with Russia.

I was very clear in those conversations that, as I said earlier this evening, we stand very strongly with Ukraine and are very strongly opposed to the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Ukrainian territory, not only or even not principally because of the shared Ukrainian heritage of some members of Parliament, but because this is a violation of the rules-based international order. That is why Canada and our G7 allies and our NATO allies have to say that cannot stand.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I appreciate that, and it is a different approach from what her predecessor took. As members know, the minister and I have both been banned from Russia and we wear that as a badge of honour, although I know it makes her job more difficult in actually being able to travel to certain places to engage in foreign policy.

The minister brought up the issue of Ukraine. I would like to go down that path, because again, her predecessor, Stéphane Dion, withdrew some critical assistance that had been provided by the former Conservative government to Ukraine to monitor the situation in Donbass with the Russian war that was being waged on the people of Ukraine by providing RADARSAT images. Budget restraint was the reason given for removing the RADARSAT images.

Does the minister plan on restarting the supply of RADARSAT imagery so that our friends in Ukraine have a better handle on what the Russians are doing in Donbass?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to, again, thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his focus on Ukraine. This is an issue in which Canada is engaged not only in our bilateral relationship with Ukraine, and in our direct conversations with Russia, but in collaboration with our partners. In fact, as we can see not only from our readout, but from the readout of secretaries Tillerson and Mattis, it is an issue that came up on Monday night at our supper in Washington. Canada can play a very strong and important role on the Ukraine issue in a way that supports our friends and allies in Ukraine, and also helps to reinforce the international rules-based order.

As the member opposite knows, the Minister of National Defence and I were pleased to extend Operation Unifier. I want to acknowledge here that this was the right thing to do for the previous government, to put that in place, and we were glad to continue that work. As the member opposite also knows well—

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry. The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I appreciate the comments from the minister. I am glad to see the government extended Operation Unifier. I am proud of the job our troops are doing over there in training Ukraine forces up to NATO standards, and getting them better prepared for dealing with the aggression they are experiencing in Donbass.

She started down the path talking about the Canada-Ukraine defence co-operation agreement that was previously negotiated by Jason Kenney when he was minister of national defence. It has been formalized and signed-off by the government, and I appreciate that. In that agreement, have there been discussions between the Government of Canada and the government of Ukraine to put Ukraine on the controlled arms list? Will the government be providing lethal defensive weapons to our friends in Ukraine to deal with the Russian aggression, the Russian equipment, and the Russian weapons being used against the innocent people of Ukraine?

● (2315)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, four hours seems like a long time, but I am finding I do not have enough time to say everything I need to say. I just want to go back for a moment, if I may, to some of the previous comments.

The member opposite and I agree about many things, but I want to underscore perhaps a point of difference, and that is to say how grateful I am for the fantastic work that Minister Dion did as foreign minister, and in a very distinguished career in public service in Canada.

As foreign minister, he really stepped up Canada's international role. He created some very important paths for dialogue, and raised our presence in the world. I want to say how honoured I am that I will have the opportunity to work with him as ambassador. He is going to represent all Canadians extremely well. I really wanted to get that on the record.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I want to move to the idea of UN peacekeeping, something the government promised during the campaign back in 2015. The government talked about it, but has gone silent since November. That was the last time we saw the Minister of National Defence actually address this issue, and he had to backtrack on timelines, and whether or not Canadian troops were going to be deployed.

In this budget, we see a reduction in funding from Canada to the United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is dropping $34 million. Is this a signal that Canada is going to be withdrawing from UN peacekeeping, and is this a signal that we will not be deploying our troops to Africa, probably to Mali and putting them in harm's way?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, we are strongly committed to peacekeeping. That was a campaign commitment, and something all Canadians strongly support. Canadians also believe that is a big decision that needs to be made very carefully. Whenever we put our troops in harm's way, we have to be very thoughtful about where that happens. We are fully committed, and we are going to make the right decision.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am going to give a 10-minute speech, and leave five minutes for questions and answers with the minister.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the committee today about issues that are priorities for the Government of Canada: promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls.

I am proud to say that gender equality and empowering women and girls are now central to Canada's feminist approach to international development efforts.

Our approach is to identify gaps and obstacles that have an impact on the fundamental rights of girls and women, on their participation in decision-making, and on their access to and control over resources.

[*English*]

We are convinced that this is the best approach to reduce poverty and inequality and to build a more inclusive world. Let me explain why. First, let us be clear that poverty is sexist. Around the world, women and girls still face many challenges in realizing their full potential. Each year, an estimated 50 million girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage. That is 50 million girls who are robbed of their opportunity to go to school and reach their full potential. Every year, out of desperation, an estimated 22 million girls and women endanger their lives by undergoing unsafe abortions. An estimated 62 million teenage girls in the world do not go to school or are frequently absent, double the number of boys, and in developing countries, women spend significantly more time than men on unpaid care, limiting their ability to invest their time in education, paid work, political and public participation, and leisure.

Second, women and girls are powerful agents of change who can drive progress toward peace, prosperity, and sustainable development. We know this, because when women and girls are part of the decision-making process, policies and programs are more effective and bring about real and lasting change. When women and girls have access to quality, safe education, their lives and the lives of those around them change for the better. They tend to marry later, have fewer children, provide better health, education, and nutrition for their families, and earn more than women without the advantage of schooling.

When women can participate in the economy on an equal footing with men, economic growth rates and income per capita increase, allowing people to be lifted out of poverty. When women and girls have access to information about their health and well-being and have agency over their sexual and reproductive health and rights, they are empowered in all aspects of their lives. Rates of unintended pregnancy, maternal mortality, and unsafe abortions go down and families thrive.

Adopting a feminist approach is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. Canada can make a real difference in the lives of women and girls around the world while ensuring that its international assistance provides the greatest development impact benefit for all.

Canada's commitment to the empowerment of women and girls received an overwhelmingly positive reception through the international assistance review. A wide array of partners and stakeholders emphasized the need to increase support to feminist and women's and girls' rights movements and women-led initiatives and to address the root causes of poverty, including gender-based discrimination, inequality, and harmful social norms.

Over the past month, we have been making it clear to our partners and stakeholders that this is the way forward for Canada's international assistance, and we have been busy delivering on our commitment to be a leader in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This is why we are supporting a comprehensive approach to close existing gaps in sexual and reproductive health and rights as a top priority.

To mark International Women's Day, the right hon. Prime Minister, along with the hon. Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, announced an investment of $650 million over three years in funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

● (2320)

Canada's support will focus specifically on providing comprehensive sexuality education, strengthening reproductive health services, and investing in family planning and contraceptives. Programs aided by this announcement will help prevent, and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting, and support for the right to choose safe and legal abortions as well as access to post-abortion care.

We have also increased spending on programming that targets the specific needs of women and girls in conflict situations. For example, as part of the $1.1 billion package for the Middle East, Canada is providing $40.5 million in multi-year programming on sexual and gender-based violence with the UNFPA in response to the Syria and Iraq crises, to include reproductive health services, as well as assistance to women and girls who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence.

Moving forward, we will take an active stance for gender equality and women's human rights in all bilateral, multilateral and international fora, and in mobilizing our partners. We will continue to prioritize gender equality initiatives starting with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, and supports to women's organizations and movements, including women's rights organizations, and we will strengthen the integration of gender equality results across all other interventions from education, to food security, to climate action.

To make a real difference, we will ensure that the empowerment of women and girls is not a check box at the bottom of a form. We want to see women and girls involved in the decision-making process, so they can shape the services, programming, and policies that touch their lives. We want to see them in positions of leadership.

Finally, we are committing to a high degree of accountability for achieving gender equality results supported by a system to measure impact, and by reporting concrete results to Canadians. Looking ahead, we are eager to release Canada's new international assistance policy statement which will tackle gender inequalities, address significant obstacles faced by women and girls all around the world, and recognize the active role that women and girls can and must play in society for everyone's benefit.

I will now take the opportunity to ask the minister a few questions. In the course of our discussions, we talked about the need for increased levels of need around the world, and the capacity for us to look at ODA and private funding, and find a medium between the two. I know the minister has talked about the development finance institute, and how it is aligned with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the sustainable development goals as well as the Paris agreement.

Could the minister elaborate on how the DFI relates to our official development at this stage?

● (2325)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, I thank my parliamentary secretary for giving me a chance to clarify an answer I gave my colleague from Essex earlier. There was a challenge there with respect to our two official languages, so to avoid confusion, I will say this:

[*English*]

DFI will complement other forms of assistance by leveraging additional private sector resources and expertise to support international development goals. The Canadian DFI financial support will be additional and complementary to Canada's ODA. As such it would not be subject to the ODA Accountability Act. The DFI will be established as a wholly owned subsidiary of EDC—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Chair, another part of the minister's responsibilities include the Francophonie. My comments mentioned increased needs, and I believe that many Francophonie countries face important development needs as they are unfortunately among the poorest and most vulnerable to climate change, conflict, and demographic changes.

Canada was well represented at the Francophonie summit in Madagascar with a delegation led by our Prime Minister. How does the minister plan to go about supporting the ever-increasing needs, particularly for the African Francophonie countries?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, yes, the needs are great and, unfortunately, are most keenly felt in a number of countries of the Francophonie that are among the poorest on the planet.

At the Madagascar summit, Canada and Benin put forward a joint resolution to fight early and forced child marriage, which is an impediment to the education of girls and, ultimately, to their full participation in the economy.

We also used the opportunity to reaffirm our support for Africa. I will share the details of our renewed commitment when the new policy is announced. For now, I can say that our investments in sexual and reproductive health and our commitment to women and girls will have a major impact in our partner countries in the Francophonie.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Chair, I would like to talk about the ongoing crisis in Iraq and Syria, as well as the impact on the region in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon that have dealt with a massive influx of refugees.

Early in 2016, we announced a new approach in response to these crises. This approach includes security, diplomatic, humanitarian, and development efforts.

We know the minister travelled to Iraq and Jordan not too long ago. I would like to know what Canada is doing to support the most affected people in this region.

● (2330)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, one of the key objectives of the approach is helping those most affected by the crises.

To meet this goal, Canada is working with experienced Canadian, local, and international partners to deliver $840 million in humanitarian assistance over three years. Our partners appreciate this multi-year commitment, because it allows them to plan for the long term. Our support is helping meet the basic needs of those hardest hit by the conflict, including food, shelter, health care, water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as protection and emergency education.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Chair, I want to talk a little about environmental sustainability.

We know that this year we have broken a record, with an unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world who have been forced from home. Climate refugees account for one-third of these people.

While people try to adapt to natural disasters and drought, many have to move to another place in order to simply survive. To address this new challenge, what does Canada do and how can our actions help to reduce the number of refugees?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, Canada has committed to contributing $2.65 billion over five years as part of our international assistance to support efforts and measures taken by the poorest and most vulnerable countries to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Canada's contribution will be made through various mechanisms and instruments and will focus on essential actions, such as helping developing countries adapt to climate change, deploy renewable energy technologies, and manage risks associated with severe weather events. We will also be making significant contributions in the area of sustainable agriculture.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Madam Chair, could the minister briefly touch on what Canada is doing to address the unprecedented humanitarian crisis with the famine that is going on in Sudan and Yemen?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, Canada has committed $120 million to help the four countries most affected by the famine.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be using my time to ask questions, and I want to start with a really easy one.

Saudi Arabia was just elected to the UN women's rights commission. On balance, does the minister think that is a good thing or a bad thing?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, it is really late and we have already had mention of the Senators and the Leafs. I went to high school in Edmonton and my heart was broken when the Oilers were knocked out last Wednesday—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I appreciate the collegiality and the hockey references, but we only have 15 minutes. I want to get through some really substantive stuff, with all due respect.

Having Saudi Arabia on the UN women's rights commission, is that a good thing or a bad thing in the view of the Minister of Foreign Affairs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I want to assure the member opposite that none of his constituents will mind us talking about the Oilers.

Saudi Arabia's membership on the Commission on the Status of Women was chosen by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Canada, as the member opposite knows well—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I do not know how far we are going to get. Maybe I will ask the same question over and over again, like last week in question period.

In the minister's view, is it a good thing or a bad thing that Saudi Arabia is on the UN women's human rights commission?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister has 12 seconds.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as I was explaining, we are not on the UN Economic and Social Council, so we did not have a vote. Saudi Arabia's regional candidacy was not contested.

That said, we are going to be very clear. We will never hesitate to—

● (2335)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I think the record will show whether the minister answered, but I have other things I want to ask about.

I gave the minister advance notice on Twitter that I would be asking this question: has the Prime Minister directly contacted Aung San Suu Kyi to raise the issue of ethnic cleansing of Rohingya in Burma, and if he has not, will he?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I am personally very seized with the issue of the Rohingya. It is something I am very focused on. In fact, shortly after becoming minister, I made a point of getting in touch with the UN special rapporteur on this issue, Professor Yanghee Lee. It is something Canada and my department are focused on. We have provided $4.3 million in support. We are on this one.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I asked this question of the Prime Minister last week. He did not answer. I asked it again and I do not think I heard an answer.

Will the Prime Minister contact Aung San Suu Kyi to raise this issue? Is the Prime Minister willing to engage on this issue? It is an issue of ethnic cleansing of a religious minority in Burma. I think it is important enough for it to be engaged at that level.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me speak for myself and my own engagement. This is something I am absolutely focused on. I have taken a direct personal interest and have spoken with people who are directly focused on this issue. My department is supporting the Rohingya refugees. They are, indeed, a persecuted ethnic and religious minority, and they have Canada's support.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, has the minister raised this issue with her counterpart in Burma?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, we as a government have been very focused on this issue with our counterparts around the world, at the UN and diplomatically.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, that question could have been answered with a yes or a no, and it was not, but I want to move on to Sri Lanka.

With respect to Sri Lanka, the Liberals promised during the last election to push hard for accountability for human rights abuses, for a long-term political solution that respects basic human rights, and for action to support victims.

It has been almost two years. I want to know concretely what steps the government has taken to implement its election commitments with respect to justice in Sri Lanka.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I very much share the concern of the member opposite for justice in Sri Lanka, and we have many members in this House, including active members in our own caucus, who are extremely focused on it. It is something that our officials are working at, that our MPs are working at, that we have been focused on in international fora and directly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I am grateful for the concern and empathy of the minister, but I asked specifically what action the government has taken, after almost two years in power, to implement specific election commitments with respect to justice in Sri Lanka.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I think I was very clear. The issue of justice in Sri Lanka is one that our government is very focused on, that members of my caucus have been extremely active on, that I have instructed my officials to work on very—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, again the minister's concern is not sufficient. I wanted to know what action was taken on that, and unfortunately we did not hear an answer.

In supplementary estimates (C) from 2016-17, there is an item of approximately $18 million allotted for loan forgiveness to Cuba. These are Canadian tax dollars that are going, effectively, to the Cuban government. I would like to hear from the Minister of Foreign Affairs as to why that is a justifiable expenditure for taxpayers.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I thought the member opposite or one of the members opposite might ask about that.

As the member may well know, this is an old loan dating back to 1975. In 1982, Cuba began repayment, but stopped making payments in 1986 because of the financial situation. In December of 2015, members of the Paris Club creditors, a group that includes allies such as the U.K., Australia, France, and Japan, decided that the thing to do was to reach an agreement with Cuba to forgive the debt. We—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I am sure Cuba was more than happy to sign on to that agreement.

I want to ask about Syria and Iraq. I know it has come up before. Does the Government of Canada recognize the genocide of the Yazidis and Assyrian Christians in Iraq and Syria?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows, we are very focused on the plight of the Yazidis. We are very focused on them as refugees. We are working hard to help some of the most vulnerable victims of Daesh, with the focus on Yazidi women and girls, to move to Canada. Our work in—

● (2340)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I am asking short questions, and short answers would be sufficient.

Does the Government of Canada recognize the genocide of Yazidis and Assyrian Christians in Iraq and Syria?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me reiterate. Our support for the Yazidis is clear. Our support for the Yazidis is recognized in our support for them as refugees. I do want to recognize the work of the member for Calgary Nose Hill, who has worked hard on this as well. Our work in Iraq focuses on helping the most vulnerable, and that very much includes the Yazidis, with a particular focus on women and girls.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Unfortunately, Madam Chair, if the Minister of Foreign Affairs cannot answer a simple yes to that question, it is quite telling.

It is also quite telling that when I asked two questions where I referred to Yazidis and Assyrian Christians, the minister talked about her concern for Yazidis but did not at all mention the situation of the Assyrian Christians.

In terms of the government's concern for Christians facing persecution, has the government made any public statements with respect to the persecution of Christians in any country?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, absolutely we have. My focus on the Yazidis was just a question of limited time. We are very focused on the plight of the Assyrian Christians.

I would also like to mention the Coptic Christians in Egypt who are suffering a very difficult situation and have our government's full support.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, the foreign affairs minister says that statements have been made with respect to the persecution of Christians. I would like to know in what countries those public statements have been made and where I might be able to find them. I looked through the Foreign Affairs website today, looked for press releases and statements referencing the persecution of Christians. I was not able to find any.

I wonder when and where those statements were made and with respect to what countries.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, my excellent parliamentary secretary, the member for Mississauga Centre, whose work I had hoped to have an opportunity to recognize this evening, has just reminded me that one example is the statement which he made in this House recognizing and advocating for persecuted religious minorities, very much including Christians.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I would certainly appreciate hearing some of the statements coming from the minister and reflected on the Foreign Affairs website because if one looks at the website, at least, to the statements coming out of the department and the minister, one might get a bit of a skewed perception.

I want to ask about a case in China which has been brought up already, but I just was not satisfied with the answer. This is the case of Chung Nan Chang, who is a Canadian citizen. He is in prison in China. This is a consular issue, but it is also an issue of China violating its trade obligations. Article VII of GATT is very clear about mechanisms for customs valuation and China is ignoring its trade obligations at the same time as it is imprisoning a Canadian.

Mr. Chang was told by Canadian consular officials that the government of Canada, including the trade commissioner service, "cannot interfere in the judicial affairs of another country."

I want to know if the minister is satisfied with the response of Canadian officials to date given that statement that was given to Mr. Chang.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me offer Mr. Chang, his family, and the member opposite a very strong personal assurance from me that we are following this case closely. We absolutely are focused on it. We absolutely appreciate and believe that this is a case that Canada must be, and is, involved in. We are in contact with the local Chinese authorities in an effort to resolve the matter. It is absolutely a case that has our attention.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, my impression so far is that there are many cases and situations around the world that have the minister's concern and attention, but I have asked specific questions about actions taken. I have asked specific questions about whether she is satisfied with the response of her officials. Again, I think the record will show that we did not hear an answer.

I want to now ask about projects of the office of religious freedom in Nigeria. There are major issues of building communal harmony in a number of countries in Africa between Christian and Muslim communities. Canada was involved previously through the office of religious freedom in a very important project in central Nigeria promoting harmony between those two communities.

Since the office of religious freedom has been cancelled, I want to ask the minister if the government has supported any projects promoting communal harmony in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa.

● (2345)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows, Canada is very focused, as I have said in my previous answers, on the rights of persecuted minorities, including, but not exclusively, religious minorities.

I spoke earlier today and was pleased to do so about our support for the persecuted homosexual and bisexual men of Chechnya. I hope we would all agree that is another group that is worthy of our support.

When it comes to Africa, we heard from my colleague, the Minister of International Development about a lot of the great work that our government is doing there.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, here is the thing. The office of religious freedom did not just express concerns, and I do not think that is all people in these communities around the world are looking for. They are actually interested in concrete action and projects. It was the fact that the vast majority of the budget of the office of religious freedom went to projects on the ground.

If the government wants to deliver these funds in a different way through a different mechanism, that is its choice, but I would really like to know what kinds of projects the government has funded, if any, around the world to build communal harmony in the way that was done previously through the office of religious freedom.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me give some examples. We strongly believe in the support of human rights and of the rights of minorities, from funding the Lifeline Project and directing all of our ambassadors to empower human rights defenders, to supporting reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka, and to having active and ongoing consultations with human rights activists, very much including religious leaders around the world.

Our government is absolutely committed to this issue. I do want to emphasize that we believe in supporting the rights of persecuted religious minorities, but not only those. We believe in supporting the rights of minorities who are persecuted also.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Of course, Madam Chair, the minister will get no disagreement from us that we should concern ourselves with the situation of all different kinds of minorities, including the issues in Chechnya, which I think many members in the opposition have spoken about.

However, it is not just enough to talk about these issues. I have asked about actions taken. The minister has referred, for example, to the actions allegedly of our ambassadors, but I have raised in the House before that if we review the Facebook page for our mission in Burma, we do not see public statements on there with respect to the situation of the Rohingya.

What is needed from the government, what is missing, is action on these issues. We have heard a lot tonight about concern, about empathy, but empathy is not enough. People expect Canada to actually step up and be involved in these issues, not just talk about them. We want to see actual money addressing these communal issues. The minister needs to speak out more clearly with her counterparts in other countries.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I want to say that we, and I personally, fully support the right of persecuted minorities very much, including religious ones. That is something I am proud to speak out about in Canada and abroad.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will present for about eight minutes, followed by questions for the minister.

This government is committed to increasing trade and attracting job-creating investments in Canada, expanding trade with fast-growing markets, and, a new government priority, advancing Canada's progressive trade agenda. To achieve these goals, the Minister of International Trade is working closely with colleagues at Global Affairs Canada, including the hon. Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, as well as colleagues in other departments, to address trade issues in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner.

My remarks will focus on the initiatives to advance Canada's economic interests through trade and investment promotion and attraction, trade diversification, and our progressive trade agenda.

Trade is at the core of Canada's past, present, and future. It is, of course, a part of our history and our prosperity. Trade is central to maintaining and improving the standard of living for Canadians. One in five Canadian jobs is related to exports, and these are good-paying jobs.

We also know that sectors and companies that trade internationally are more innovative and more competitive. The global environment is ever changing. Currency fluctuations, government regime changes, and political and security situations, for example, are among many factors with an enormous impact on the conditions under which Canadians operate in a trading environment.

In many countries in the western industrial world, we are also seeing a growing concern that international trade and globalization in general have not lived up to their promise, the promise of jobs, growth, and prosperity for workers and their families. These sentiments have resulted in a growing opposition to trade agreements, particularly with some of Canada's major trading partners, including in the U.S. and the EU. This is why, more than ever, Canada needs a strategy that considers this reality. Our response is threefold.

First, as Canada's chief marketing officer, the Minister of International Trade is leading the charge for our trade commissioner service, which works diligently to promote Canadian capabilities in the U.S. and around the world to help firms succeed and sell Canada to investors. A key focus of the strategy will be securing and advancing our commercial interests in the U.S. market, which remains the primary driver of Canada's trade performance. With our trade and investment strategy, we will be expanding programs like CanExport to help new and existing firms navigate not only the U.S. market but also global markets, with targeted financial assistance.

Second, we wish for Canada to be an attractive investment destination and to strengthen the Canada brand internationally. The implementation of the invest in Canada hub by the end of 2017 will help enhance Canada's attractiveness for foreign direct investment, making it simpler to invest in Canada and to strengthen the government's capacity to market Canada as a premier destination for investment.

Third is an ambitious trade negotiations agenda. To expand Canada's free-trade agreements globally, the government works hard to build and maintain a network of trade agreements that will provide greater market access for Canadian businesses. This ambitious trade negotiation agenda includes new and modernized trade agreements, which help companies access new markets. First is by providing preferential access over many competitors, or at a minimum, to level the playing field. Second is by fostering a more predictable and transparent trade environment. Third is by integrating Canadian companies with global value chains.

I would now like to turn to some of the trade initiatives that are central to this trade negotiation agenda.

The swift implementation of CETA with the EU remains our number one trade priority. This gold standard agreement is great news for Canadian companies, as it will lower the cost of doing business. Canada is moving forward with approval domestically, and in fact, it received royal assent yesterday. Businesses will be able to immediately take advantage of CETA's economic benefits. With provisional application, 98% of EU tariff lines will be duty-free for Canadian goods, and an additional 1% will be eliminated over a seven-year phase-out period. Global Affairs Canada is working with our partners in the private sector and with provinces and territories to organize events that will help Canadian businesses better understand the benefits of CETA.

An important focus of Canada's trade negotiations agenda is to expand and deepen our links with fast-growing markets. In 2016, emerging markets accounted for only 10.4% of Canadian exports, which means that there is a lot of untapped potential there. With emerging markets such as China, India, and Southeast Asia, economies that are expected to continue outperforming established markets for the foreseeable future, it is even more important to explore these high-growth prospects.

● (2350)

China is a good example. The size and rapid growth of the Chinese market presents opportunities for Canadian companies in a wide variety of sectors. China represents the largest share of Canadian exports that is not already covered by an existing free trade agreement or the concluded CETA.

We have been working with China on exploratory discussions since the fall, and have held two face-to-face exploratory meetings so far. A third set of discussions is scheduled for July in Beijing.

We are also committed to hearing the views and feedback of Canadians. We launched public consultations on March 4, and the minister and I have been actively involved in public consultations. The outcome of the exploratory discussions and what we hear during the consultations will inform the government's decision on whether to launch free trade agreement negotiations.

With respect to other partners in Asia, Canada is considering how best to advance its trade objectives in the Asia–Pacific region and members of the trans-Pacific partnership countries. The hon. minister continues to remain engaged with these countries on next steps.

Key among these partners, of course, is Japan. Canada is eager to enhance our economic and commercial partnership with Japan and is in discussions with Japan on how best to do this.

The Government of Canada is also committed to expanding trade relations with partners from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Our ongoing work with ASEAN members on a free trade agreement feasibility study reflects our commitment to expand our free trade agreements globally and seek opportunities for Canadian businesses.

We are also engaged in trade negotiations with India, and are exploring trade opportunities in Latin America, particularly with Mercosur members.

Underpinning these trade initiatives is the development of the government's progressive trade agenda, which recognizes that trade policies need to respond meaningfully and contribute to broader economic, social, and environmental policy priorities. We need to communicate clearly and demonstrate to citizens the concrete difference that trade makes in their lives. We need to ensure that trade works for everyone, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Canada is looking to take a leadership role internationally and we are taking every opportunity to advance this in the international community.

For Canada, what a progressive trade agenda means is negotiating strong provisions in areas such as labour, environment, gender, and government's right to regulate in our trade agreements. It also includes a focus on transparency in the negotiation process and requires inclusive consultation.

Last, supporting the progressive trade agenda with complementary domestic policies will help to ensure more inclusive economic growth so the gains from trade are broadly and equitably shared and create jobs for the middle class.

Now, I have some questions for the minister.

As a member of Parliament representing British Columbia and a fourth generation Vancouverite, I am very proud that B.C. is the gate to Asia-Pacific. That is because of the rich history of the west coast of Canada. It truly is where east meets west, and has for well over a century. It is also because of the concerted effort for decades on the part of all three levels of government and business to build the Asia–Pacific gateway, including the country's largest port, the port of Vancouver, and the Vancouver International Airport.

This year, YVR was voted best airport in North America for the eighth consecutive year at the Skytrax World Airport Awards. These awards are as a result of 13.8 million passengers voting, and YVR broke all records. No airport has ever won this eight years in a row. As well, YVR has six Chinese airlines flying across the Pacific, which is two more than its closest competitor in North America. This is not just demand driven; YVR has set out intentionally to attract this kind of investment and provide this kind of service.

I also know that provincial governments and businesses across the country take an active interest in Asia's markets, with a network of provincial trade offices throughout the region as well as those of the federal government.

I was in Vietnam, Singapore, and Brunei a few weeks ago, promoting softwood lumber and Canada's progressive trade agenda.

● (2355)

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry, but the time is just about out. If we want an answer from the minister, I will allow the minister to make a statement right now. Otherwise, I will have to adjourn the House.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Madam Chair, I would ask him to comment on the Asia–Pacific region and the importance to Canadian exporters.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I will make it very simple for those who are watching in Vancouver. Those people have a great member of Parliament who is doing an astonishing job. I would like to acknowledge the privilege I have of serving with a great parliamentarian and parliamentary secretary. She has been a great advocate of Vancouver, British Columbia, and making sure that Canada is very much on the trade agenda when it comes to Asia-Pacific. I thank the member, and I thank those in B.C. who are watching us tonight.

The Deputy Chair: I want to thank the Minister of International Trade for his comments.

It being 11:58 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported, the committee will rise, and I will now leave the Chair.

● (2400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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