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# House of Commons Debates

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Tuesday, January 28, 2020

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, January 28, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

### PETITIONS

#### OPIOIDS

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition calling on the government to declare a public health emergency for the opioid crisis that is affecting Canadians right across the country. We have lost over 12,000 Canadians to the opioid crisis.

The petitioners are from Courtenay—Alberni. They are calling on the government to reform current drug policy, to decriminalize personal possession, to create a sense of urgency and immediacy and to create a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so that people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to a contaminated source.

The petitioners are calling on the government to declare the current opioid overdose and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency under the Emergencies Act in order to manage and resource it with the aim to reduce and eliminate preventable deaths. This will save lives.

The petitioners are calling on the House to take real action.

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### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AUDIT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTING IN CANADA PLAN

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC)** moved:

That, given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that “Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government’s \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan” and that the “PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist”, the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government’s “Investing in Canada Plan”, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises; and that the Auditor General of Canada report his findings to the House no later than one year following the adoption of this motion.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my regards to my esteemed colleagues and to Canadians. I am very pleased to rise today to give my first speech in the House in 2020.

Before I get into the meat of today's motion, I am sure that my colleagues really want to know why I am so proud to rise to speak today. What has changed in 2020? What has changed since 2019? We have entered into a new decade. The Conservative leadership race is under way. We have a new Speaker in the House. The Quebec regional media have been saved, and I am now the critic for infrastructure and communities.

That, however, is not what I am most proud of. What then is so special about 2020? Although members may not be able to tell from looking at me, I have changed. It has nothing to do with new year's resolutions. I do not exercise enough, I do not always eat the way I should, and I did not make any resolutions to be kinder to the government in the House. Sorry about that. What has changed is my title.

For a week now, my wife Caro and I have been able to proudly call ourselves grandpa and grandpa. My son David and his wife Audrey welcomed a baby boy named Clovis into the world.

I wanted to dedicate this first speech to my very first grandson and to his parents, who have made me so proud today. Welcome, Clovis. It is for you and all other children like you, for their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, that we all gather here to make Canada a place where families can succeed and thrive.

*Business of Supply*

As parliamentarians, we must never forget that despite our differences of opinion and different visions of how to go about it, we have a duty and a responsibility to safeguard the well-being of our children and all children, as well as their future.

As I said, I did not make a resolution to stop holding this government to account, so it is also for Clovis that I moved a motion today. On behalf of the official opposition, my motion holds the government to account with respect to infrastructure.

The motion is very clear. The 2018 budget provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7-billion infrastructure spending plan. The Parliamentary Budget Officer requested a new plan because some of the funds had not been spent, but, unfortunately, he was told such a plan did not exist. That means the Parliamentary Budget Officer is no longer in a position to give parliamentarians the facts. That is why we are now calling on all parliamentarians to ask the Auditor General of Canada to audit the results of the Liberal government's investing in Canada plan and look into how it is being run.

Despite all the Liberals' claims and lofty promises, their infrastructure plan has not achieved the stated goals. They went on and on about how their \$186-billion plan would put Canadians back to work, but the numbers make it clear that a significant amount of that money was never actually released, that the impact on employment was not as promised and that promises to grow the GDP were never fulfilled.

I will start with a bit of background. Let us look back to the 2015 election campaign. The 2015 campaign will probably go down in the books as the one when the Government of Canada spent more than at any other time in Canadian history, largely because of a promise that was broken. I must admit that this promise made Canadians happy at the time, but they got duped by a party that was prepared to promise heaven and earth in order to get back in power.

After pulling the wool over their eyes, the leader of that party, the current Prime Minister, soon went back on his word and drove the federal books into his party's trademark colour. Since 2015, Canada has been in the red because of the red party, and the situation keeps getting worse with every passing day.

What was that promise? No, it was not electoral reform, although that pledge did not come true either. The Prime Minister and his then candidates travelled all over the country repeating that they would run modest deficits of \$10 billion the first year, \$10 billion the second year, and \$6 billion the following year, before returning to a balanced budget at the end of their term. They wanted to reassure everyone, because people had a sneaking suspicion that the red party might like red budgets.

● (1010)

The government not only failed to keep its promise, but it even decided that balancing the budget was not important. Indeed, there is no plan to balance the budget in the foreseeable future. There is spending, spending and more spending. What was the justification for this promise?

The government said it wanted to run small deficits to invest in our infrastructure in order to create jobs and wealth. That is what it

said. The previous Conservative government managed to bring in an ambitious infrastructure plan that did not burden our grandchildren. The logic was sound. We could take advantage of the low interest rates to take on tangible infrastructure projects. We might have seen something tangible. We might have seen some results. We might have seen Canadians at work. This could have had an impact on our economy. At the very least, if the money from these loans went toward our infrastructure, we might have seen results. The problem is that reality caught up with the government rather quickly. The most positive of Conservative pessimists understood. Spending did increase, the deficit ballooned, but the investments in infrastructure did not materialize.

The Liberals' investing in Canada plan, the government's \$186-billion cornerstone of infrastructure spending, made several promises to Canadians:

1. Rate of economic growth is increased in an inclusive and sustainable way.
2. Environmental quality is improved, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are reduced and the resilience of communities is increased.
3. Urban mobility in Canadian communities is improved.
4. Housing is affordable and in good condition and homelessness is reduced year over year.
5. Early learning and child care is of high quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive.
6. Canadian communities are more inclusive and accessible.
7. Infrastructure is managed in a more sustainable way.

That is straight out of the investing in Canada plan. That is what the Liberals promised to do with those billions of dollars.

Have Canadians seen a single one of these objectives materialize? Unfortunately, it is obvious that the government failed to meet its objectives during its first mandate; if we look at the numbers and everything before us, it will not meet them in this mandate.

The government failed miserably. Unfortunately, it also failed to report to parliamentarians on its management of the \$186-billion investing in Canada plan. I am sure I am not the only member of Parliament who has been waiting since the announcements, since the last election campaign, to see shovels in the ground across the country over the past four years. We were expecting to see roads, bridges, schools and community centres being built. We thought they would be all over the place. We thought that every single riding we represent would see something. We thought that this multi-billion-dollar investment plan would create jobs.

I now have a question for my colleagues. Have there been many projects in their ridings? Have they seen trucks or shovels in the ground?

**Some hon. members:** No.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. It did not happen. MPs are not the only ones wondering, which brings me to today's motion. On a number of occasions, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and his office have taken a look at expenditures and results of the investing in Canada plan.

We have a role to play as parliamentarians. The role of Parliament, of the House of Commons and MPs, is to grant the government the money it needs to operate. For instance, in a majority situation, the government has no problem spending as much money as it wants, since it holds a majority when the time comes to vote on supply. In a minority situation, if it loses a single supply vote, the government falls and is dissolved. Why? Because the House refused to grant the money it has asked for.

Since parliamentarians are responsible for granting supply, it just makes sense that parliamentarians should have access to all the information on government spending in order to make informed decisions on public finances. Unfortunately, the government has obviously not provided parliamentarians with all the information on the actual status and results of the investing in Canada plan.

● (1015)

We cannot make any assumptions about the government's good or bad faith, and that is why we are calling for an investigation today.

The information may have been buried in the mountain of data coming from the machinery of government, making it impossible to find. There are approximately 5,000 public servants responsible for collecting information in order to report to Canadians. We are all aware of just how much information one person can produce in a day. If all that information was given to parliamentarians before it was sorted or without any explanation or cross-referencing of figures, parliamentarians would obviously have no idea what they were looking at. Despite all the means at our disposal, we would not be able to make any decisions because there is simply too much information.

That is why Parliament created the position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I would like to quote the first two paragraphs of the website, which gives the history of that position. It states:

The position of the Parliamentary Budget Officer was created in December 2006 as part of the Federal Accountability Act. It was a response to criticisms surrounding the accuracy and credibility of the federal government's fiscal projections and forecasting process.

At the time, some economists and parliamentarians were concerned that successive governments in the mid-to-late 1990s through the mid-2000s had shaped fiscal projections, overstating deficits and understating surpluses for political gain.

The role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is important, which is why we need to take his reports on Canada's public finances very seriously.

He has taken a look at the investing in Canada plan and its actual results. He has mentioned them several times in his reports and in testimony before various parliamentary committees. What he tells us is troubling. It is time for another organization, like the Auditor General of Canada, to take a closer look at how the Liberal government is managing the \$186 billion it received from parliamentarians for this infrastructure plan.

I just want to summarize the revelations and observations made by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I want to thank his team for their collaboration and for answering our questions.

The first report is dated March 29, 2018, and is entitled "Status Report on Phase 1 of the New Infrastructure Plan". PBO officials essentially state that they noted several information gaps that were primarily due to the inability of departments and agencies to provide enough details to reconcile the overall spending that had been announced with the sum of the individual projects. Despite their experience, the PBO analysts were unable to match the exorbitant amounts that had been announced with the projects on the ground. That is unacceptable.

The report also revealed this:

Of the total \$14.4 billion budget for NIP Phase 1, federal organizations have been able to identify \$7.2 billion worth of approved projects that were initiated in either 2016-17 or 2017-18. Thus, \$7.2 billion of Phase 1 funding is yet to be attributed to projects.

Only half of the total budget was attributed to projects.

We all remember the basic premise: run small deficits to invest in infrastructure and create middle-class jobs. Those small deficits now add up to \$26 billion, but only \$7.2 billion was actually invested in projects during the government's first term. That is unacceptable.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, "such unexpected delays can also provide insight regarding whether federal infrastructure spending is a useful policy instrument for short-term fiscal stimulus." Obviously, if we do not invest, there will be no fiscal stimulus. Without money, trucks and workers on the ground, there will be no job creation.

In other words, the Liberals' big promises turned out to be empty ones. Their airy promises of fiscal stimulus amounted to nothing.

According to the same report:

Budget 2016 committed \$11.3 billion...in infrastructure spending over 2016-17 and 2017-18, resulting in an expected increase in the level of real GDP of 0.2% and 0.4% in 2016-17 and 2017-18 respectively.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that GDP only increased by 0.1% over those two fiscal years. We call that missing the mark outright, not just a little.

● (1020)

Here is another quote:

We estimate that Budget 2016 infrastructure investments will provide a modest boost to...GDP and employment over the remainder of the planning horizon.

Not only were results poor in the past, they will be poor in the future.

That is not all. In analysis of budget 2018, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's comments about the Liberal infrastructure plan are scathing.

### *Business of Supply*

Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the Government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan. PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist. Roughly one-quarter of the funding allocated for infrastructure from 2016-17 to 2018-19 will lapse. Both legacy and new infrastructure programs are prone to large lapses.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer then rightly goes on to suggest that parliamentarians may wish to ask questions about that, which is what we are doing today.

After failing to carry out phase 1, the Liberals have no plan for how to invest the tens of billions of dollars allocated to more than 50 programs falling under some 30 agencies and departments. They are incapable of doing the legwork, incapable of reporting to Parliament and incapable of providing a comprehensive investment plan.

We have all day to talk about it. I know that my Liberal colleagues will spend the day telling us about the wonderful projects that have been completed and other projects that have been announced without really knowing when those will get off the ground. Some projects have been announced once, twice, three times. The cost is not calculated. If that is how the Liberals balance their budget, it does not work.

The fact is that there is no plan and management is piecemeal, and so there is no impact on the economy. Instead of celebrating, my colleagues opposite should be as concerned as we are about the government's inability to plan for its infrastructure investments.

I would like to talk about another a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I explained earlier that the government failed to live up to expectations. I will now explain how this Liberal government, which wanted to impose its infrastructure plan on all the provinces, ended up back at square one.

In a report tabled in Parliament in March 2019 entitled "Infrastructure Update: Investments in Provinces and Municipalities", staff at the office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that they were not able to independently verify that the federal funds had indeed increased infrastructure spending overall, since part of the federal increase appears to have been offset by planned decreases in provincial spending.

Am I to understand that the Liberal government forgot that it is not authorized to invest in provinces on its own and that it did not get assurances that the money it was loaning to build roads, bridges and social housing would be used for new investments? All of that lip service and those projections were cancelled out because the Liberals were unable to make sure that the provinces would keep up with their own investments.

Here are some figures from the Parliamentary Budget Officer:

...according to their 2016-17 and 2017-18 budgets, provinces were planning to spend \$100.6 billion in capital. Instead, they invested \$85.1 billion, which is \$15.5 billion lower than their initial plans.

That is what the Liberals are trying to hide. The investing in Canada plan has failed to create wealth for the middle class, failed to achieve anything tangible and failed to be transparent and accountable.

The final straw came during the last election campaign, when we asked the PBO to analyze one of our proposals. Here is the reply I received:

...you asked if we could provide you with a copy of all the data sets provided to us by Infrastructure Canada with regard to a complete list of the projects and their funding allocations.... Unfortunately, Infrastructure Canada considered these data to be confidential, so they were not disclosed.

That response is unacceptable. Given the government's lack of transparency and accountability, the Conservatives believe that the Auditor General must immediately conduct an audit of the investing in Canada plan. Naturally, we are counting on the collaboration of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP to shed as much light as possible on how the Liberals are managing the \$186 billion. Canadians and parliamentarians of all stripes have the right to know what the Liberals are doing with their money.

• (1025)

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member across the way is even more honourable now that he is a grandfather. I congratulate him on the birth of Clovis. It is a great role, and I also enjoy my three grandchildren, Michael, Anna and Jack. A lot of the work we do in this place is for them, including investing in infrastructure.

It is a very interesting discussion today because it really highlights the need to work with all orders of government. In Guelph we recently made an announcement of \$170 million going towards electric buses, charging stations and a new garage for transit. Of this \$170 million, \$40 million came from the federal government, \$30 million from the province and \$100 million from the municipality.

Our role as members of Parliament is to start these discussions within our communities, to talk about the opportunities that the federal government has as a partner and to drive projects like this forward. I have four housing projects I am working on with CMHC along with the three orders of government in Guelph as well. The federal portion changes the conversation.

Could the hon. member talk about how he is engaging with his community and the provincial government to drive projects forward for his community?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, on the Infrastructure Canada website, in the "Investing in Canada Plan" tab, there is a map that shows all of the projects that were announced in every community.

We are not denying that communities need a real plan, a real opportunity to invest in upgrading infrastructure and public transit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are not denying that Canadians, municipalities and provinces need a real opportunity to invest in adapting municipal sewer systems and react to climate change. I think that we can all agree on that.

*Business of Supply*

The problem lies somewhere between the Liberals' promises and what is really happening on the ground, or what failed to happen in 2016-17 and 2017-18. That is what we want to know. Why is there a difference between the two? Why do the numbers and the announcements not reflect what is happening on the ground?

• (1030)

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech, and we fully intend to support today's motion.

I do want to point out, however, that the Conservatives have really changed their tune since they were in power and presided over the public-private partnership fiasco. The Conservatives spent billions of dollars, most of which ended up in the coffers of private corporations. The same thing is happening now right here in Ottawa, with P3s channelling profits to the private sector while saddling taxpayers with all the costs and, unfortunately, making Canadians foot the bill when problems come up.

Here is my question: Have things changed within the Conservative Party? Do Conservatives now understand that the approach they took while in power was a bad one?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. If I may, I want to take a moment to savour the first part of his question, when he said that he would support our motion to find out more about the Liberals' infrastructure plan.

If we look ahead, which is the direction we should be looking, we absolutely must find out where the money is going and why the money that had been promised to communities has not been invested. We must find out why projects aimed at upgrading infrastructure to prepare for climate change, for example, have not come to fruition.

We also want to hear the Liberals' new plan. If \$7 billion has not been spent in two years, how will it be spent in the coming years?

Unfortunately, we have not been able to get an answer, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer has not either.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Madam Speaker, my question is for my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable.

We all remember the 2015 election. The Liberal Party promised that Quebec would get its infrastructure funding in a lump sum, that it would be transferred in a lump sum, since the Government of Quebec and the municipalities manage most of the infrastructure and have the expertise. As we saw, once the federal government gets involved, everything takes longer. The Liberal Party, which became the Liberal government, wanted to put an end to those interminable delays.

Many will remember that it took the Harper government two and a half years to bring in a framework agreement, and another year and a half per project. Unfortunately, the Liberal government quickly went back on its word and never raised the issue again.

Would my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable agree that the money should be transferred to Quebec in a lump sum in order to shorten the delays and because Quebec has the expertise?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, ideally, these decisions would be made locally, by people who are in touch with local residents and who are in a position to make the best possible decisions themselves. I was the mayor of Thetford Mines for seven years, and I can say that if I had been allowed to manage infrastructure budgets without 12,546 restrictions, I would have been able to make better decisions. Some things would have been done much quicker.

There need to be negotiations between the provinces and the federal government, but obviously, the fewer restrictions the federal government puts on transfers to the provinces, the better for everyone. That is also true at the second level: The fewer restrictions the provinces impose on the municipalities, the better for everyone.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, sometimes we can learn from the past. During the global recession, the Conservative government committed to getting \$47 billion out the door over two years. An Auditor General's report said we did it effectively and managed the risks. If we have a government that is effective, the commitments that have been made can get done. Because at the time there was an Auditor General's report, can my colleague see any conceivable reason why the Liberals should vote against this transparency of government?

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, I think that today there is one question we need to ask all parliamentarians: Do they want to have all the tools they need to make good decisions in order to provide the government with all the money it needs to operate? Getting that information requires transparency about investments, transparency about economic growth forecasts and transparency about progress towards greenhouse gas reduction targets. When the government says it is going to invest such and such an amount to achieve a given result, it also needs to present a status report. Unfortunately, we are not getting one, nor is the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We therefore call on the Auditor General to take a brief look into the 50 programs currently being administered by the government and tell us what is going on with them.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, during the back-and-forth between the Conservative member and the Bloc member, there was a discussion about getting the projects at the ground level so that the communities and provinces could deal with those objectives and priorities. The interesting thing is that is exactly what the gas tax does, which we doubled in the last session of Parliament. Rather than doing one-off buildings of gazebos, creating fake lakes and having ribbon-cutting ceremonies, like the Conservatives used to do, we have decided to give the money from the gas tax right to the communities and provinces so they can decide what to do with it. Would the member agree the program does exactly that?

*[Translation]*

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has about one minute to respond.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, one minute is not enough time to explain to my colleague opposite how the gas tax transfer represents only a very small part of the \$186 billion that is unaccounted for.

The member ought to be careful about saying that our request focuses exclusively on the gas tax. The Conservative government made the federal gas tax transfer permanent. That means that we truly believe in it. Had the government decided to invest more in the federal gas tax, we would not have opposed that measure. However, we need to remain flexible. The Liberals opposite are not in the habit of remaining flexible when they transfer a program. They impose all sorts of conditions, and the municipalities and provinces do not really like that.

*[English]*

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak today about the Government of Canada's investments in Canadian communities and in our country's infrastructure.

I have spoken in the House before about my career before politics as a city planner and I have shared the story of how that experience led me to enter public life. As an urban planner, I became all too familiar with the sorry state of our nation's infrastructure and the serious threat that it posed to the sustainability, security, prosperity and even the livability of our communities. I was also keenly aware of the opportunity before us, the potential of infrastructure to set our cities and towns up for success, if only we could find the confidence to invest in our cities, our towns and our own future.

I answered the call that I heard to enter federal politics because I wanted to be part of a team that would make historic investments in infrastructure to help to literally reshape communities for the better.

As city and town planners, we have a vision for Canada where our communities empower citizens, where our communities lead Canada toward its best days. As planners, we push for a connected Canada with world-class local and regional public transit systems that get us not just to work on time but across the province dependably, an inclusive Canada with secure and affordable housing options for middle- and low-income Canadians, with quick and direct

access to the places where we live, work and play, the supermarket, the doctor's office, the school, the neighbourhood day care and the ice rink. We push for a resilient Canada that is well prepared for the challenges that come with a changing climate and rising sea levels, cities and towns that are cleaner and less reliant on sources of energy that pollute our skies and harm our health, communities that are less resource intensive and do more with less, and a vibrant Canada strengthened by cities and towns that feel like home, with community centres, libraries, YMCAs, museums, theatres and parks.

Here is the good news. The Canada we seek is closer now than it has ever been. We are on the threshold of sweeping transformation and the renewal of the Canadian community experience.

In 2015, our government was elected on a mandate to make those historic investments in infrastructure. Right out of the gate, we got to work. In close consultation with indigenous partners; provincial, territorial and municipal leaders; and stakeholder groups like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, we designed the investing in Canada plan, a visionary, long-term plan that is investing billions in infrastructure projects in every corner of this great land, a plan the magnitude of which has not been seen since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal of more than 80 years ago.

● (1040)

*[Translation]*

Our government believes in the importance of investing in infrastructure, and the plan is tangible proof of what the government promised Canadians specifically: to create good jobs, grow the economy and invest in clean air and water, modern and reliable public transit, strong infrastructure and sustainable communities.

*[English]*

Our progress has been tremendous. Since the plan was launched, over 52,000 projects have been announced government-wide, with federal contributions of nearly \$60 billion. Almost all of these projects are either started or completed.

As we said they would, these investments are translating into greater economic growth. Since 2015, Canadians have created one million new jobs, and 77,000 of these are strong, middle-class jobs in the infrastructure sector. Investments delivered by Infrastructure Canada are a core contributor to this outcome.

Through our new and legacy infrastructure funding programs, our work on building major bridges, our support for partnerships through the Canada Infrastructure Bank and the smart cities challenge, we are directly growing the economy and creating communities that work.

In 2016, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimated that fully one-third of our infrastructure was only in fair, poor or very poor condition. That is why in our very first budget, budget 2016, we committed \$14.4 billion for projects that could be delivered quickly, projects that would see new public transit, green and social infrastructure built, and existing assets rehabilitated, repaired and modernized. It also provided funding for post-secondary education and broadband access for remote communities, because these are essential to helping all Canadians prepare for the future.

Nearly all of these projects are under way or completed, meaning communities across the country have already benefited from the projects delivered during that phase.

[*Translation*]

For example, in Plessisville, Quebec, we invested nearly \$24 million in the renewal of water pipes and the replacement of aeration pipes throughout the municipality so that families can have peace of mind and continue to have access to clean drinking water.

[*English*]

In Bonnyville, Alberta, we invested over \$32 million to extend the regional water supply system to bring more safe, clean water to homes.

At home in Halifax, we invested \$24 million to purchase two new ferries and 39 new buses, cutting congestion on our city streets and improving the daily commute for many residents. In Toronto, Ontario, we invested close to \$310 million to purchase new, clean diesel and hybrid buses to help reduce greenhouse emissions, traffic gridlock and travel time in one of Canada's busiest cities. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, we invested \$12 million to help renew and upgrade its existing fleet of buses to help more people get to and from work and to essential services more quickly.

[*Translation*]

Those were all projects Canadians told us they needed in order to prosper.

[*English*]

Through budget 2017, we committed an additional \$81.2 billion in funding for large-scale projects that would transform the landscape of Canadian communities in five key priorities: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation infrastructure, and funding for rural and northern communities infrastructure. Public transit projects, like Vancouver's Broadway Subway, will create new links between communities and change the way that residents get around their cities.

One year later, in our second budget, budget 2017, we introduced two new initiatives: the smart cities challenge and the Canada Infrastructure Bank. The smart cities challenge is a pan-Canadian competition designed to spark innovation and empower communities to adopt a smart cities approach to improve the lives of their

### *Business of Supply*

residents through innovation, data and connected technologies. I can tell members that those of us in the city planning community were overjoyed with the announcement of the smart cities challenge. Finally, there was opportunity for citizens to be part of building the innovative, sustainable, modern cities that truly belong in the 21st century and a chance to get people excited about what was possible in our communities if we put our best minds together to develop forward-thinking policies.

The benefits for the winners of the first challenge are clear. Bridgewater, a challenge-winning community in Nova Scotia, is working to help lift residents out of energy poverty. Communities in Nunavut are benefiting from measures to reduce the risk of suicide. Guelph and Wellington County in Ontario are implementing their first technology-enabled circular food economy. Montreal, Quebec, is innovating to enhance mobility and access to food for its residents.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

All of the participating communities repeatedly talked about the major benefits, such as the opportunity to explore new ideas, access means and funding at the municipal level, and integrate even more digital technology and information into community planning.

[*English*]

The Canada Infrastructure Bank, CIB, is a Crown corporation that leverages federal support to attract private sector institutional investment to new revenue-generating infrastructure projects that are in the public interest. The CIB is focused on trade and transportation, public transit, broadband, and green projects, including clean power. It is advancing a new model through expert advice and evidence-based decision-making. By drawing on the capital, experience and expertise of the private sector, the bank is helping to encourage beneficial partnerships between the public sector and the private sector, which in turn make more infrastructure projects for Canadians possible while helping public dollars go further.

We have continued to build on successes and deliver results for communities across Canada. For example, through budget 2019, we provided a one-time top-up to the federal gas tax fund, which provided an additional \$2.2 billion to municipalities for their priorities. In Halifax, that meant an additional \$26.5 million last year.

*Business of Supply*

The mandate letter for the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities makes additional commitments to Canadians, such as permanent federal public transit funds that will rise with the cost of construction, a national infrastructure fund that will support major nation-building projects, and the promise that any funds from our existing programs for provinces and territories that have not committed to approve projects by the end of 2021 would be reinvested directly into communities through another top-up of the federal gas tax fund.

We are continuing to invest in infrastructure in new and innovative ways, because our government knows that investing in infrastructure is not a one-size-fits-all approach, which is why it is not the work of one department alone.

[*Translation*]

The investing in Canada plan is the result of 14 federal departments working together to invest in Canadian cities. This approach gives us the flexibility and adaptability to meet Canadians' needs while ensuring that all levels of government make informed, strategic, evidence-based decisions.

To be clear, the provinces, territories and municipalities are the ones that will benefit from this approach, because they own 98% of all core public infrastructure. That is why Infrastructure Canada worked with Statistics Canada to conduct the first national survey to provide a snapshot of the stock, condition and performance of core public infrastructure.

[*English*]

This inventory would not only help municipal, provincial, territorial and federal leaders determine how best to invest federal funding based on what they need and currently have, but it would also help provide baseline evidence to help monitor and assess the impact of federal investments under the plan over time. By including different funding streams with specific outcomes in our plan, and different funding mechanisms, and by working closely with our partners to be responsive to their needs, we are delivering results to Canadians.

In support of the Government of Canada's policy on openness and transparency and to provide the best information to Canadians, Infrastructure Canada, along with the other delivery partners, communicates progress and results on its investments to Canadians through a variety of reporting methods.

● (1050)

[*Translation*]

A detailed outline of the framework and the objectives of our investing in Canada plan can be found online on the Infrastructure Canada website. Canadians will also find detailed information on the implementation of the plan, the progress that has been made and the latest funds invested, as well as an online map showing the location of infrastructure projects in their communities.

[*English*]

Detailed information on the projects funded through the investing in Canada plan is also posted on the federal open data portal, shared through various traditional and social media channels and

made available in departments' respective annual departmental results reports.

Finally, Infrastructure Canada also issued its first annual progress report in May 2019, which provided an update on the implementation of the plan across all departments. This report is available on the department's website, and we will continue to report transparently to Canadians on an annual basis on the progress and results of the plan.

The Government of Canada is proud of its accomplishments through the investing in Canada plan and how infrastructure investments are helping improve communities across the country.

I have risen in the House today in response to a motion put forward by my colleague, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. In his motion, he made several statements that I would like to address.

My colleague began by referring to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's March 15, 2018 post, which stated, "Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the Government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan."

In his March 2018 report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer looked at investments in infrastructure across a number of departments and compared the investments these departments reported to the Government of Canada's planned spending for that period. The PBO asked for information from a number of departments and agencies about their spending on infrastructure.

In light of this, Infrastructure Canada and the other federal departments worked closely with PBO staff to provide updated data and results, and an updated report from the PBO was issued in August 2018.

[*Translation*]

According to the most recent version of the report, the Government of Canada is fulfilling its promise to make a historic investment of over \$180 billion in public infrastructure over 12 years, to grow the economy and to create jobs for Canadians.

[*English*]

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's independent economic analysis concluded that the federal investments made under budget 2016 helped stimulate both economic activity and job creation in its first two years. These benefits have continued to accrue over the remaining life of these programs.

Furthermore, in July 2018, the Governor of the Bank of Canada also reported that the country's economy was operating close to capacity and the labour market was strong. In fact, since the start of our government's mandate, Canada's unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest level in four decades.

To return to the motion from the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, he further states that the “PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist”. On the contrary, the plan exists and information on the plan is available to all. As I stated earlier, in April 2018 the then minister of infrastructure and communities released a publication to the media and the public, and posted it on the Infrastructure Canada website, that lays out all of the new funding programs being delivered under the plan by department.

As I mentioned earlier, the annual progress report released in May 2019 is also available on the website. Those viewing the list of programs may note that some are delivered through bilateral agreements between the federal government and the provinces and territories, which I will speak to briefly.

As members know, Infrastructure Canada is a federal funding partner for Canada's core public infrastructure, and most of its funding programs are delivered in partnership with the provinces and territories. The funding programs under the investing in Canada plan are no different in that regard. Under budget 2016, Infrastructure Canada delivered two funding programs: the clean water and wastewater fund and the public transit infrastructure fund. To deliver these programs, Infrastructure Canada signed its first bilateral agreements in 2016 with each of the provinces and territories, which spelled out the terms, obligations and commitments of each party. Under these agreements, the terms and conditions of this funding were clearly defined, as the funding was intended for the repair and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure projects.

As well, funding recipients were asked to report back to the government on a semi-annual basis. To deliver budget 2017 funding, Infrastructure Canada signed new bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories in 2018, which provided updated criteria for the funding streams included in the agreements as well as the new reporting requirements.

The funding criteria under the new bilateral agreements focus on outcomes. Project applications have to show how a project will meet these outcomes. Outcomes can include increased access to potable water or increased energy efficiency of buildings, or in rural and northern communities, improved food security.

The 2018 bilateral agreements also included revised reporting requirements, which include a detailed biannual progress report. These reports are used by the Government of Canada to provide important updates to Canadians on the progress and benefits of the projects in their communities. The full details of the bilateral agreements, including their outcomes and reporting requirements, are all publicly available on Infrastructure Canada's website. I encourage my fellow members to examine these for themselves.

By working in close partnership with the provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous partners, we are ensuring that our smart, strategic investments in infrastructure will continue to help create good jobs and deliver real results for Canadian communities.

### *Business of Supply*

I am proud of the work our government is doing to ensure that our communities will grow and succeed now and into the future. In respectful and productive collaboration with members on all sides of the House, we look forward to continuing on that path because we know there is still a world of opportunity that awaits us out there.

Every day citizens are developing new ideas and technologies to build better communities for all of us, whether it is at CarbonCure, a company in my home province of Nova Scotia that is helping us reduce the carbon footprint of our built environment by developing greener concrete, or at LakeCity Plastics, also in Nova Scotia, a company that transforms thousands upon thousands of plastic bags into picnic tables like those we recently revealed on the Halifax waterfront.

The future is bright for our cities and towns, because when Canada builds, Canada grows.

Therefore, I would like to move an amendment to the motion. I move that the motion be amended by deleting the words “given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that ‘Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure plan’” and the phrase “PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist”, and substituting for them the following: “given the House recognizes the importance of making smart infrastructure investments that improve the lives of Canadians”.

I am thankful for the opportunity to rise and speak in the House today.

● (1055)

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable if he consents to this amendment being moved.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Madam Speaker, one cannot make the Parliamentary Budget Officer's reports go away with an amendment, so the answer is no.

[*English*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** There is no consent. Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, my colleague from Joliette aptly said that the solution to unblocking infrastructure work across the country, especially in Quebec, is to transfer the funds with as few conditions as possible.

*Business of Supply*

Our colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable said that obviously we would like the provinces in turn to impose as few conditions as possible on the municipalities. Mayors know all about this.

My question is for the government. Would it consider easing up on some of the conditions?

It would make sense for the funding to be granted without conditions. The problem with this federation is that half the taxes go to the federal government, although it has less than half of the jurisdictions. That is where transfers come in. It is fundamental and a matter of efficiency.

I want to raise two specific points. In the case of transfers under the gas tax program and Quebec's contribution, are people in the government in a position to allow work on municipal buildings? Sometimes that needs to happen. Is there room to do some work at internal economy that could lead to tremendous savings? When funding is blocked, it can double or triple the cost of a project. Some local experts just want to get to work and get the economy moving. That is what every MP wants.

• (1100)

[English]

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Madam Speaker, I want to assure my colleague that, having spent 20 years on the front lines as a planner at the municipal and provincial levels, I understand very well that it is the people on the ground who understand the requirements of projects and the needs of communities better than anyone else. I would completely agree with that.

However, we can also agree that we as a federal government and as a Parliament also have to exercise some oversight and accountability on how those dollars are spent to ensure that outcomes are achieved that Canadians are looking for. This government was elected on a mandate to reinvigorate and reinvest in communities to create prosperity and jobs, and we have an oversight obligation to make sure that happens.

As the Prime Minister often says, better is always possible, and I am open to any kind of suggestions the member might offer to improve the language in the agreements.

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Madam Speaker, first I want to pay my respect to my hon. colleague for the quality of his French. He said many sentences in French, and we deeply appreciate that. However, it is not because he spoke in French that I totally agree with him.

[Translation]

That is why I was so surprised by the amendments he proposed. He wanted to gloss over the facts. The fact is that over the past four years, this government failed to show any transparency with regard to accountability for major infrastructure projects.

My question is perfectly simple. Why does the government want to deny the facts with regard to transparency?

[English]

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Thank you for your kind words on my French. I am working hard to improve all the time.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I do want to remind the member to address his response to the Chair.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Madam Speaker, I would like to begin this response in the same way that I ended the last one: Better is always possible.

The motion was predicated on the earlier March report from the PBO that identified where we could do better. We did do better and closed the gaps identified in that report. That caused the PBO to issue a second report later in that same year, declaring that we have in fact met the obligations that were set out to us.

I spoke in great detail in my speech about all the transparency mechanisms that are in place, from the infrastructure website to other government accountability websites. I would invite members of the House to agree with the PBO that we have in fact met our obligation to invest over \$186 million in Canadian communities to improve the economy and create jobs over 12 years.

[Translation]

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I too noticed that the member's French is coming along very well, which is great.

[English]

In my riding of New Westminster—Burnaby, there are cities desperately looking for infrastructure funding. The deficit on infrastructure funding has increased. It is now well over \$170 billion. The concern, of course, is that we need the infrastructure funding, yet tens of billions of dollars have been promoted by the government as part of its budgetary documents but not allocated to municipalities across the country. That is the problem.

That is why it is so obvious to me as a member of Parliament, and should be to all members, including members of the government, that what we need is more transparency. We need the Auditor General to look into this issue. I am a little disturbed by the purported amendment by the government, because it would take away the ability of the Auditor General to look into this situation.

Therefore, my question is very simple. Given the fact that there is so much concern around infrastructure funding, why are the Liberals opposed to having the Auditor General fully look through all aspects of infrastructure funding?

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Madam Speaker, we are very proud of this plan. We will welcome as many eyes upon it as possible; in fact, the more, the better. We are very proud of this plan, which is changing the lives of Canadians every day.

One of the things the member for New Westminster has identified is that there are needs in communities that he perhaps feels are not being met. I would like to take this opportunity to underscore the complexity of many of these projects. Infrastructure Canada and the federal government do not reach down into communities and declare what is important and what is not.

I find myself having conversations with my constituents frequently. As much as they would like a new bus line, it is not in my ability to design a new bus route. Rather, we create the systems through which the municipalities and the provinces apply. Tenders have to be let, projects designed and, finally, contracts given. This all takes time, sometimes years.

• (1105)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for highlighting the importance of our role as facilitators in this discussion.

It is clearly a role we need to be taking seriously, versus saying the federal government is not there at the table. Our role is to be at the table and to make these conversations happen.

Could the parliamentary secretary maybe expand on the role we play as members of Parliament to drive these projects into our communities? Without three levels of government working together, 65 electric buses in Guelph would not have happened.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Madam Speaker, at the beginning of my remarks, I talked about how we had engaged meaningfully with first nations, interest groups like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and with provincial and municipal leaders across the country to develop this plan. As I said earlier, the people on the ground and on the front lines know best what is needed.

I often have conversations with constituents in my riding, who are seeking a better transit system or more bike paths, for example. I tell them that they should speak to me so I can ensure those criteria and monies exist. However, they also need to speak to their municipal councillors and members of provincial legislatures to ensure these projects are elevated to a high priority on those agendas as well.

It really is about all levels of government and stakeholder groups working together, be they bike advocacy groups, transit advocacy groups, the FCM or the provincial and municipal groups. We have had a really wonderful record over the last four years of just that.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to make two quick points.

First, during our session with the Parliamentary Budget Officer yesterday, he said that the way the federal government administered infrastructure money was like a giant octopus, spreading its tentacles across the federal government, that there were serious information gaps and that Canadians really did not know where the money was going and how it was being accounted for.

Second, I would like to ask the member for Halifax whether he would take a specific look at the Mission sanitary crossing in my riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. My riding is along the Fraser River and our engineers, our local experts, have indicated that if this sewage project is not dealt with appropriately, we will have a serious environmental disaster.

**Mr. Andy Fillmore:** Madam Speaker, I would characterize the infrastructure program as a loving embrace, rather than as the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon characterized it, causing smiles and tears of joy and happiness from coast to coast to coast.

### *Business of Supply*

We are absolutely committed to improving lives in every community across the country, including the riding of the member. On his specific points about the sewage project, I would be happy to have a conversation about that, and I look forward to it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue. We will each have 10 minutes, and I am looking forward to hearing his speech.

First off, I want to go back to the content of the motion moved by my colleague, the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, so that we can see what it is about. The motion essentially says the following:

That, given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that “Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government’s \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan” and that the “PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist”, the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government’s “Investing in Canada Plan”, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises; and that the Auditor General of Canada report his findings to the House no later than one year following the adoption of this motion.

There is something there, and I expect this to be an interesting discussion. Before I begin analyzing our response to the motion, I would like to first indicate that the Bloc Québécois intends to vote in favour of this motion for several reasons. Here are the main three.

The first reason is the delay in spending, which members have already mentioned. Since 2016, the government has delivered on only a small part of the announced infrastructure spending. When money is announced for a project, that money is needed for the project to begin. That is even more important when it comes to infrastructure because infrastructure is something that our constituents, our communities, our towns and our cities need to operate, to grow and to have a healthy economy.

It always fuels cynicism when the government announces \$300 million for this or \$1 billion for that, but the money never comes. We are obviously concerned about these delays in spending. We would therefore like the Auditor General to tell us what is really going on.

*Business of Supply*

The second reason is the importance of transparency when it comes to economic data. Without numbers, we cannot really get an accurate picture of the situation. The government's numbers are never very clear. It appears to be recycling amounts from previous announcements whose time is running out. Is that money being reclaimed or not? Is it being reallocated elsewhere? Nobody knows what is going on with that money.

Obviously, we think that when the government makes spending announcements, the money should actually be spent on what they said they would spend it on, especially when it comes to infrastructure. Our communities have infrastructure needs, especially Quebec communities, and we will look at why a bit later. Transparency is important because we need predictability. People need a clear sense of the situation not only so they can really trust the information they get from the government but also so they can make good decisions and adjust plans as needed. Without that information, people are flying blind.

The third reason why we plan to vote in favour of the motion is that we believe it is important for Quebec to obtain its fair share. When there is a delay in spending and a lack of transparency in the data, it is difficult to know if Quebec is getting what it is entitled to.

According to one of the PBO's reports on phase 1 of the infrastructure plan covering the period from 2016 to 2018 and tabled in March 2018, Quebec received only 12% of total investment under the program while Quebec accounts for 23% of Canada's population. I think it goes without saying that we find that offensive and, above all, inadequate. Like anyone else, we Quebecers pay taxes to Ottawa, and we expect to receive our fair share of the taxes that we send to Ottawa until we become independent. Let us hope that happens as quickly as possible.

I will do a brief comparison of amounts received by Quebec compared to those received by the other provinces, according to the table on page 9 of the PBO's report. If we look at the figures for Ontario, for example, we see that it received 32% of total infrastructure investment for 2,884 infrastructure projects, which represents \$161 per capita. We see that Ontario's share of the investments was not so shabby.

• (1110)

Other provinces were spoiled even more. On a per capita basis, Yukon received \$1,797, Nunavut received \$2,146, the Northwest Territories received \$1,618, and Newfoundland and Labrador received \$1,752. If we look at what each of the provinces received, we can see that Quebec was overlooked and received the least money. Ontario was next, but it still managed to receive nearly its full share. By way of comparison, Ontario is getting 32%, or \$161 per capita, and Quebec is getting 12%, or \$97 per capita. Some provinces are getting thousands of dollars per capita, yet Quebec cannot even get \$100. It is easy to understand why we are not too happy with these figures and why we would like some answers from the Auditor General.

Other things are brought up in that Auditor General report. The Prime Minister had planned to spend \$14.4 billion in 2016-17 and 2017-18, as stated in his infrastructure plan. According to the Auditor General's report, however, it appears that only 50% of planned expenditures were actually spent.

There is no excuse. Sometimes, they tell us that it takes a while to come to an agreement, that there are administrative delays and that projects are not being submitted. A little later in the same report, we see that 17% of projects received no funding even though they had been approved. One in five approved projects did not receive any money.

This is inconceivable and inexplicable to us, and we very much look forward to hearing the real explanations that the government will give us. We have not heard any yet, but perhaps the Auditor General will be able to tell us more.

We also know that it is always harder for Quebec to secure funding. We have some demands. We want 100% of the funds earmarked for Quebec to stay in Quebec, we want Ottawa to send the money directly to the Quebec government, and we want it to stop imposing all kinds of conditions. Apparently, that does not suit Ottawa, and it always slows things down.

It is important to know that only 2% of public infrastructure in Canada falls under federal jurisdiction, and the remaining 98% comes under either municipal or provincial jurisdiction. The federal government owns only 2% of infrastructure, yet it controls a large portion of the budget and imposes all kinds of conditions on everyone.

It is not familiar with the reality in the municipalities and the provinces. A central government does not have the credibility to say that it understands the reality in every municipality in the country. Canada has 5,000 municipalities, but the Bloc is concerned first and foremost with the 1,400 municipalities in Quebec. It would be impossible for Ottawa to be familiar with the reality facing each and every one of them. Federal regulations make it difficult for the municipalities to qualify for and secure the funds that are rightfully theirs. This is especially true for small municipalities, which do not have an army of staff to research how to qualify for the various federal government programs, how to submit an application and how to navigate all the bureaucracy.

Clearly, it would be far more efficient if the money were transferred to Quebec so that it could be distributed based on people's needs. The money would trickle down much faster to where it is needed on the ground.

The Bloc Québécois is permanently stuck in this tug-of-war, because we want Quebec to get the money to which it is entitled.

I know that I am running out of time, but I want to close on another topic, namely the Canada Infrastructure Bank, for which the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is responsible. After all, we are talking about infrastructure. It is very hard to get service in French when dealing with that bank. Since the bank was founded, there has not been a single executive, press secretary or CEO who speaks French. No one can respond to the municipalities in French. It is a major problem. We are talking about \$35 billion that the federal government is investing in this bank. The private sector might be investing in it as well.

It was even reported a few days ago that no one at the office of the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities speaks French. It is clear that we are more than misunderstood in this country. Quebecers would be much better off if we could manage our own money.

• (1115)

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

I have a fairly simple question for him. The government has proposed an amendment that preserves the intent of the motion, namely to call on the Auditor General to conduct an audit. The government proposed deleting some words in the preamble that are not part of the motion, but are insulting to the government.

Does the Bloc Québécois agree with the amendment, which maintains the substance of the motion?

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Speaker, personally, I have difficulty understanding why the government would feel insulted by comments that were not even made by the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. Those were the comments of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, a completely neutral public servant who provides accurate information to inform the people and parliamentarians.

In my opinion, the fact that the government is ashamed of or insulted by the statements of any public servant shows just how terrible a manager it is and how relevant the elements of the motion are.

• (1120)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, during the 2015 election campaign, the Liberals made many wonderful promises in response to the infrastructure crisis everywhere in Canada.

What the government actually did was create the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which will privatize Canada's infrastructure. For lobbyists and the government's good friends, it is an open bar.

I am worried about the potential privatization of municipal water systems across Canada. The NDP will fight to defend this principle. Is the Bloc ready to defend this principle and the need to ensure that water infrastructure across Canada remain in public hands?

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague from Timmins—James Bay that the Bloc Québécois has always maintained that public infrastructure should remain public and belong to ordinary people, to our citizens. This infrastructure does not belong to lobby groups or to private corporations that want to take advantage and pocket some money at the expense of the people.

We believe that citizens have a right to these services. They pay for these services through taxes and they are entitled to them. These services should not end up lining the pockets of shareholders or companies that have connections with the infrastructure bank or with the government.

We believe that public infrastructure belongs to the public. Whether we are talking about water or waste-water systems, it is critical that they remain accessible to the public.

### *Business of Supply*

[English]

**Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris-Moose Mountain, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for indicating his support for this motion and I appreciate that comment.

He had a chance to talk a bit about the infrastructure bank, and I would like to hear a little more from him on that. He talked about the administration issues and the poor ability to speak French, etc., and I am sure he is aware that over \$11 million was spent on its administration in 2019.

The reality is that rural Canada is suffering because of this infrastructure bank. The infrastructure bank is only going to give projects to rural communities if the projects are over \$100 million. I know he has a lot of those issues in his riding and I would love to hear his comments on how it is going to impact rural Canada and rural Quebec in particular.

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Speaker, I must admit that I did not fully understand my colleague's question, but I do understand he is concerned about how money is being used in the infrastructure bank. He wants the money to serve communities. This is important to me as well.

However, above all else, we must remember that the infrastructure bank makes decisions about public infrastructure. Infrastructure bank money should not be used to put tolls on bridges, highways or water. Citizens will ultimately not be able to pay for these things.

This is our concern. We want Quebec to be able to manage the investments made in Quebec, which cannot really happen with a bank that is controlled by Canada.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is dedicated to strengthening development in the regions of Quebec, particularly by activating Canadian federal government resources and adhering to recognized development principles to create a vigorous economic ecosystem with the Quebec national government, sector stakeholders, and the people of all regions of Quebec.

Like Quebec nationalists throughout history, the Bloc Québécois still has to fight tooth and nail to defend the development interests of Quebec's regions from the Canadian federal government, which constantly interferes in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction.

However, the Bloc Québécois can assure the House that co-operation with the Canadian federal government is possible provided that the government pledges to make investments in a specific program or file that meets the expectations of the Quebec government. Here are some examples relating to a rural riding like your own, Madam Speaker.

### *Business of Supply*

First of all, let us take the example of sports infrastructure. People who live in regional capitals like Rouyn-Noranda and Thetford Mines do not have access to high-quality sports facilities. Back home in Rouyn-Noranda, there was a multi-sports complex project that never came to fruition. The complex included a soccer field, a pool and other infrastructure. The federal government was not part of this project, and it fizzled out. There is also a pool project in Témiscamingue.

As one member mentioned earlier, in rural areas where the population is less concentrated, people do not have the same means and so it is not as easy for them to carry out such projects. The federal government therefore needs to establish eligibility criteria that correspond with the realities of each region. Once the objectives are established with the federal government, it is up to Quebec and the municipalities to carry out the projects.

I would now like to talk about municipal infrastructure and waste-water treatment in particular. Some municipalities along the St. Lawrence River do not have the necessary infrastructure to deal with their wastewater, which means that raw sewage is sometimes being dumped into the St. Lawrence River, as others have mentioned. Many Quebec municipalities dump their wastewater into lakes and rivers. That is unacceptable. Municipalities must be given the means to improve their existing infrastructure.

Speaking of water, I also want to give the example of the municipality of Angliers in Témiscamingue, which does not have any drinking water abstraction infrastructure. Its residents have to drink bottled water, which is distributed by truck. That is unacceptable. That is also the reality in far too many indigenous communities, which lack the modern infrastructure required to provide clean water.

While we are on the subject of indigenous communities' infrastructure needs, let's talk about housing, a very important issue at the root of many social problems. Sadly, indigenous individuals live in some of the worst conditions in Quebec and Canada. Their homes are too small and in terrible condition. That affects their development.

That makes social housing infrastructure transfers top priority for us and for other parts of the country. The federal government must transfer funds to build social housing units and repair existing units, and it must put Quebec and municipalities in charge, no strings attached. Vacancy rates are very low right now in Quebec and pretty much everywhere else. In Rouyn-Noranda, the vacancy rate is 1%. The need for social housing in Abitibi-Témiscamingue is great. Here again, the criteria do not reflect regional realities, and we have to wait for money to get these projects going.

In addition, the shortage of affordable housing is exacerbating the problems of housing and homelessness. Housing is sometimes more expensive than in large urban centres. Inflation is an issue across Quebec. The lack of affordable housing is also exacerbating the labour shortage, since it seriously hinders our ability to attract newcomers, be they from Quebec or elsewhere, and help our businesses remain competitive and address the labour shortage. This again raises the issue of appeal.

Still on the topic of infrastructure, another issue that affects the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region as well as the Laurentides—Labelle riding is the infamous Highway 117, also affectionately known as “bloody 117”. It is one of Quebec's deadliest highways because of the often dangerous conditions and the amount of heavy truck traffic. There is little room to pass other vehicles, and this sometimes leads to dangerous behaviours. This piece of infrastructure comes under the Quebec Department of Transport, but it is also part of the Trans-Canada Highway. In the past, the federal government has invested \$11 million in repairs to various parts of that highway, including a bridge.

• (1125)

Could the government give that some thought?

As far as road infrastructure is concerned, the village of Moffet wants to bring the Grassy-Narrow bridge back into service. This will be a collaborative effort with the Anishinabe community of Long Point First Nation. The goal is to open up this part of eastern Témiscamingue, improve forestry development conditions for the companies and provide access to tourists or those who use the land recreationally.

Infrastructure for our farmers is another issue that is important to me, especially when it comes to slaughterhouses. There are many farmers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Can the federal government contribute to ensuring that we can consume locally produced meat? A federal government contribution can make a difference by funding local initiatives. The reality is that our cattle and other livestock have to travel 800 kilometres to be slaughtered. It is a matter of freshness, quality of life of the animals and our ability to consume local products.

A solution may exist my colleague's riding, Timmins—James Bay, specifically in the municipality of Belle Vallée. Is it possible to have an agreement providing that our farmers can have their animals slaughtered three kilometres from the Témiscamingue border instead of having to travel over 600 kilometres? Can Quebec, Ontario and Canada sit down and come up with a solution if an initiative cannot be funded in the region? We have to find a solution to open up the region, including by lowering the cost of transporting livestock for slaughter.

We are also wondering why federal buildings that are no longer in use are not turned over to the community. They could be used for innovative projects such as early childhood centres, housing or community hubs. Government of Canada buildings in the region are not just white elephants, they are also the elephant in the room. These buildings are no longer occupied and the region needs the type of quality services that could be provided there.

The digital desert is another issue. Programs must be adapted for all regions, in particular rural regions. We do not have as large a population as Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal and therefore investments are not as profitable for companies. We must move forward with this plan. There is a cost to ensuring land use just as there is to not doing so. Modernizing the digital network is also important for local agriculture and to help attract young families, among other things.

There is a regional initiative, called GIRAT, that is very exciting. The Mobile A-T project, valued at more than \$13 million, is being carried out without any federal funding, even though the federal government is responsible for telecommunications.

Let us go to public transportation. Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa and Toronto are not the only cities that need public transportation. It would be useful to have programs create infrastructure to help these regions develop. Drummondville, for example, is one of many regions looking to improve service with a train. Cost is obviously an issue, as is the frequency of trips.

Business opportunities become an issue. Access to quality air service is required. A lot of investments are made in airports, but infrastructure is in serious need. The frequency of flights and the impact on costs are also at play. This is all interconnected.

There are other examples. We can look at Nav Canada, which provides on-site infrastructure to help maintain the quality of service and safety. All of the incubator projects are also useful to economic development stakeholders.

If the federal government cannot take care of its infrastructure in the regions, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and across Quebec, it should transfer that money to Quebec. This infrastructure is crucial to our development.

• (1130)

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. He talked a lot about his region and about the importance of funding infrastructure projects.

The question I wanted to ask him is about the way money is transferred. Like Quebec, Ottawa is growing increasingly infatuated with the idea that funding public-private partnership projects serves the public interest. However, that is not the case. We know that these public-private partnerships waste money.

Here is the question I want to ask my colleague. With regard to funding infrastructure projects, whether in Quebec, Ottawa or the municipalities, would he agree that the investment should be primarily public, to ensure that the interests of the general public are represented?

• (1135)

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby for his question.

The Bloc Québécois and I agree that there should be public funding. However, we are also reaching the stage where funding is urgently needed, especially in resource regions. The reality is that projects are no longer happening. There is an infrastructure deficit, and these programs will have to be rethought in order to meet our needs and the needs of the regions.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague from Abitibi-Témiscamingue for his excellent speech.

He raised a list of concerns about infrastructure. There is a long list of needs. Unfortunately, we are always seeing delays, and Que-

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bec has to scramble to get its fair share. That is basically what he said in his speech.

There is a great need to bring high-speed Internet to the regions. This is true in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Joliette and most other regions of Quebec. It is taking longer for Quebec to implement its connectivity program because of spending delays, criteria that must be met and the fact that the province has to negotiate with Ottawa and elbow its way to the table.

Does my colleague believe that the simplest and most effective solution would be to transfer a lump sum to reduce delays, yes or no?

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member for Joliette's excellent question.

The situation in Abitibi-Témiscamingue is dire. The Government of Quebec contributed \$10 million to the GIRAT connectivity project I mentioned earlier. People in the regions got fed up with waiting for money from a federal program that is not well suited to regional realities.

In Canada, 80% of the population lives in urban centres. According to Canada's connectivity strategy, 95% of Quebecers and Canadians should have mobile wireless coverage and Internet access. Sooner or later, programs will have to be adapted to the needs of resource regions. We pay half our taxes to Ottawa, so a fair share of that money should be spent where people are.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member is highlighting one of the challenges we have in working with municipalities and provincial governments.

Previous questions talked about big business somehow being involved. However, these funds are administered with our partner agencies, through the provinces and municipalities, the Canada Infrastructure Bank, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Employment and Social Development Canada. We have several channels that we as parliamentarians use to connect to our communities.

Could the member comment on the work he does to connect his communities to these types of programs?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Guelph for his question.

I do that work every day. During my campaign, connectivity was my top priority. It is important to staying connected to people in every rural municipality.

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I live in Rouyn-Noranda, and I cannot even get to the airport without losing cell coverage. This is a real problem that makes it hard to attract young families to our communities. It has a serious impact on our businesses' economic development.

In this day and age, connectivity is a must. I would note that the minister responsible for rural development has also made regional connectivity and access to high-speed Internet and cell coverage a priority. I will do everything I can to help her get real results and Internet access for all.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the excellent new member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

[English]

This is not a debate that is abstract at all. When we talk about infrastructure and infrastructure funding in this country, the lack of coordination and the shortchanging we have seen over the last few decades from Ottawa are causing real hardship right across the country. In this regard, I would criticize as openly the Harper Conservatives as I do the current government for their refusal to adequately fund what is becoming a chronic problem in this country. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and many other groups have identified the shortfall. We are talking about an infrastructure deficit of over \$170 billion in this country and that does not include first nations communities.

What does that mean? That means the infrastructure that was put in place largely after the Second World War, in the 1950s and 1960s when there was adequate government funding for this, to ensure that we have water treatment and sewage facilities, roads and bridges has not been renewed.

The Liberal government will say that it has funded some of the infrastructure that is needed. Today as we go through the discussion and debate in the House of Commons, we will find that the Liberals will mention particular projects that have been funded. Certainly, those projects are welcome. The reality is we are talking about a massive infrastructure deficit of over \$170 billion in this country. That some infrastructure funding is being forwarded does mean that it is doing some good and making some progress, but what that means is that while the house may still have a leaky roof, while the toilets do not work, while there is no heat, yes, we have windows being replaced and a new front door.

What I am saying is that we are far from the degree of investment that is required in this country to bring the quality of life right across the country up to speed. This is a profound problem. That is why we welcome and support the motion that was brought forward today.

The difference between the rhetoric and the reality is that the government has said that it is financing all of these infrastructure projects, and yet tens of billions of dollars remain unallocated to this day. That is something only the Auditor General can look into with the expertise that he has to offer, to make sure that parliamentarians, of course, but more importantly Canadians as a whole, can get a real handle on the massive debt between the rhetoric and the reality.

The reality is that we are in an infrastructure crisis in this country. The rhetoric is that somehow the government is addressing this. However, the few projects the government is financing are far from what is needed across the country.

I am proud to represent the cities of New Westminster and Burnaby, both led by very progressive city councils that are endeavouring to do things with the small amount of taxpayers' dollars that the municipalities actually get, around 10% of the taxpayer pie. The tax dollars that are actually allocated across the country come from municipalities. We have good infrastructure that has been put into place because the cities and the recent new B.C. government have been providing supports for some of the infrastructure that is needed. We are still a far way from having in place an infrastructure program that addresses the \$170 billion and growing deficit that we have in this country.

• (1140)

[Translation]

That has to change. It is obvious when one looks at the state of our highways, bridges and waste-water treatment centres. There is a difference between rhetoric and reality. La Presse even reported a few months ago that the state of our roads is deteriorating, not just in Quebec but across Canada. This is because the funding that should be going to infrastructure is not being allocated. That is why we are experiencing a crisis.

[English]

The government will say it has allocated money in each budget. The Auditor General will be able to tell us to what extent that is the reality. The Auditor General will be able to tell us that the funding announced by the government has actually led to infrastructure projects being started and to what extent municipalities in rural and urban regions across the country have been able to access that money. In New Westminster we are looking for a renewal of the Canada Games Pool, which was built over 40 years ago and needs to be renewed. New Westminster would like to see some of that funding coming from the federal government. At the moment, that has not happened.

Burnaby has identified a number of sites for housing. Both Mayor Jonathan Côté in New Westminster and Mayor Mike Hurley in Burnaby are endeavouring to ensure that all aspects of quality of life are increased in those two cities by getting the needed infrastructure funding.

What has been the government's approach? First off, when we talk about the overall allocation of funding, the Auditor General will be able to determine in a way that only his department can determine the extent to which the funding has actually been allocated. More importantly, when we talk about the funding itself, the question is how that money is being allocated.

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Under the previous government we had public-private partnerships. In public-private partnerships it costs the taxpayer significantly more to ensure private profit for what is essentially public funding. I can point to the debacle of the Ottawa LRT, a public-private partnership where billions of dollars from the public were allocated to put in place a transit system that has become notoriously unreliable. I travel each day to work. I have tried to travel on the LRT. However, in recent days, as with so many other people in the national capital region, I have been unable to take the train because the number of trains and their frequency has been reduced through this public-private partnership. As a result of that, the ability of citizens to access this service has been circumscribed. This is just one example of many.

Similar concerns have been raised about the government's approach with the Canada Infrastructure Bank. A previous member of Parliament, Guy Caron, who was finance critic for the NDP, repeatedly raised concerns, as have other NDP members, around the idea that public money would go to further private profit. In the executive suite of the Canada Infrastructure Bank we have seen what can only be described as chaos, a turnover of those people that had been appointed to head up the bank. Very little progress has been made. Arguably, the most significant projects that have come through the Canada Infrastructure Bank were already online for public investment. The federal government played a shell game around that to try to give some credit to the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

It is so essential that these aspects of the use of the public dollar be examined by the Auditor General. The Auditor General has the confidence of Canadians. The Auditor General can look at these projects and within one year can bring forward recommendations about how infrastructure funding should be treated in this country. It should not serve for friends of the government to make a profit out of this. It should not simply be a piggy bank for election campaigns.

What we need is a sustained ongoing source of public funding that municipalities across the length and breadth of this country can depend on. That is why the NDP is supporting the motion.

• (1145)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am curious to know how the member can support this motion based on the fact that the preamble to it, basically everything before “that” in the motion, is misleading at best.

The truth of the matter is that although the PBO did make these comments at one point, after it was given updated information the PBO went on to state that the Government of Canada was delivering on its commitment and providing the right information.

I understand the motion, and I think that the motion in terms of involving the PBO is important and very well justified, but the problem is that the information that follows the “that” part in this motion does not paint the full picture. It is actually suggesting that the government never ended up following up on what the PBO was after, when the government did and the PBO acknowledged that.

Why would the member support the motion knowing that there is misleading information at the beginning of it?

• (1150)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Speaker, I am really concerned and disappointed by what the Liberals have said thus far. This almost seemed to me to be a no-brainer, the idea that the Auditor General intervene and provide the expertise that is needed on what is, at the very least, a very problematic approach to infrastructure that the government has taken, the difference between money allocated and money that has been purported or announced, and the concerns about money going essentially to fuel private profit as opposed to ensuring that the public good is taken care of. These are all important questions.

I do not understand why the Liberals in the House are opposing having the Auditor General look into funding. That is the role of the Auditor General, and it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to refer this matter to the Auditor General.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate our colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, on his speech.

I want to ask him a question. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP often agree when it comes to funding for social issues, particularly social housing.

Do the NDP members support the Bloc Québécois' efforts to get the federal government to remove the conditions on its funding programs wherever possible and transfer the money to Quebec and the other provinces, which are closer to the people and in a better position to manage it wisely?

I mentioned social housing, but I am wondering about infrastructure in general.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

This is why we support the proposal that the Auditor General look at this funding in its entirety, including the conditions attached to all these funding matters. In my opinion, the important thing is that the government has mismanaged the entire infrastructure file, including social housing. That is another issue, but I believe that my colleague and I will agree about the pitiful state of funding for social housing in Canada.

I believe it is extremely important for the Auditor General to examine all these matters, including the conditions, which are part of a multi-billion-dollar program that has been of very little benefit to date.

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**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, if we look at the mandate letters of previous ministers of infrastructure and the current Minister of Infrastructure, all infrastructure decisions are to be made under the lens of the impact on greenhouse gas emissions. However, the PBO has been unable to determine just what impact the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions has on infrastructure. I wonder if the hon. member can speak briefly on that.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Madam Speaker, that is actually a very big question, and I think it demands more than a brief answer.

Obviously, in a time of climate emergency where so much of that climate emergency is having a direct impact on infrastructure, it is something that we would hope the Auditor General would take a look at as well.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as this is my first speech in the House, I hope you will indulge me as I take a moment to thank the people of Skeena—Bulkley Valley for placing their trust in me as their representative. I would also like to thank my wife Michelle and my daughters, Ella and Maddie, for their unwavering love and support.

The riding I have the honour to represent is not only the largest in British Columbia; it is arguably one of the country's most spectacular, from the snow-capped peaks of Atlin to the lush forests and fjords of the Great Bear Rainforest. This riding includes three of British Columbia's great wild salmon watersheds: the Nass, the Stikine and the Skeena, for which it is named.

Skeena—Bulkley Valley is also home to tight-knit, resilient, hard-working communities, and to indigenous cultures that have called this place home for thousands of years. It is truly a privilege to speak on behalf of such a special place in the conversation about our country's future.

The Wet'suwet'en people, on whose unceded territory my family has made its home, taught me the word *wiggus*. It means respect for ourselves, for each other and for the land. I hope that over my time in this place, I will live up to the spirit of *wiggus* in my words and actions.

Prior to this role, I had the opportunity to serve for eight years as the mayor of the Town of Smithers, which was an honour and a joy. The motion we are now debating concerns infrastructure and my time as mayor helped me appreciate how important infrastructure is to the quality of life Canadians enjoy.

That is why, in general, I support the government's focus on infrastructure investment. When it is done properly, investing in public infrastructure creates jobs, makes life in our communities more enjoyable and helps combat climate change.

However, the motion is calling for an audit of the government's \$186-billion infrastructure plan, and it is difficult to argue with a motion that seeks to help Canadians gain greater clarity on what infrastructure funds are being spent on and whether the investments are achieving the government's stated goals.

I must admit, it was alarming to read that budget 2018 only accounted for \$21 billion of a total \$91 billion in infrastructure fund-

ing, and that the Parliamentary Budget Officer found it difficult to fully account for the delivery of promised infrastructure funding.

I and many Canadians are left wondering where the \$70 billion is that was unaccounted for. This is a government that promised transparency, yet we read that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has had difficulty accessing the documents needed to evaluate spending plans. I am hopeful the work described in the motion will help Canadians understand if their government is indeed living up to the stated goals of its infrastructure spending program.

One of those goals is supporting a low-carbon green economy, an imperative my colleagues and I certainly support. However, the term "green" has become a bit of a catch-all that can refer to such a wide range of initiatives as to make it nearly meaningless. When it comes to the climate crisis, Canadians deserve more than window dressing. They deserve measurable actions that add up to deep reductions in climate pollution.

Does the government's infrastructure spending add up to these deep reductions? Is the government investing in, on one hand, projects that reduce pollution, and on the other, projects that increase it? Is the government maximizing pollution reductions by requiring carbon-sequestering materials like wood in projects, or materials such as lower-carbon concrete? We heard my hon. colleague speak to that earlier today. Is the government's spending on transit delivering projects that will most effectively reduce emissions and help Canadians access jobs and services?

We need assurance that our investments put us on track to meet our international obligations, and I am hopeful that the audit called for in the motion we are debating today will provide such information.

After all, the government has yet to show how it will meet even the Harper government's weak climate targets, which themselves fall far short of what is required to meet our obligations under the Paris accord. This is to say nothing of the government's new ambitions for 2050. Infrastructure projects are long-term investments and Canadians deserve to know we are getting it right the first time. In many ways, we only get one shot at this.

● (1155)

The investing in Canada program includes a funding stream focused on investing in northern and rural communities. As the representative of a riding where the largest municipality has a population of only 13,000 people, I would like to see this audit include an analysis of whether there is an equitable balance between rural and urban infrastructure investments.

Rural places are integral to the fabric of our nation, yet often get overlooked. At the very least, we must ensure rural residents are receiving their fair share of the overall infrastructure spending so they can realize the benefits that larger centres too often take for granted.

I recently met with Carol Leclerc, the mayor of Terrace, who told me about her city's pressing need to upgrade transportation infrastructure and accommodate growth from unprecedented industrial activity.

I know that the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako is desperate to see improvements in high-speed Internet service for rural residents. Prince Rupert, a city of only 12,000 residents, has estimated its infrastructure deficit at over \$350 million. Highway 16, the Highway of Tears, runs through our riding and still lacks adequate cellphone coverage along long stretches. On Haida Gwaii, residents want to end their dependence on diesel power and instead move rapidly to renewable energy.

Nearly every community in northwest British Columbia has projects on the books to renew water and sewer lines, water treatment facilities and other core infrastructure.

In my home community of Smithers, a recent asset-management planning exercise found that \$30 million in water sewer and storm sewer upgrades will be required in the next decade.

Finally, the Resource Benefits Alliance, a group of 21 local governments in my region, recently commissioned a study on the infrastructure needs of northwest B.C. communities and found that approximately \$1.3 billion is needed to replace and renew critical infrastructure in our region alone. This story is the same across Canada. Northern and rural communities deserve an equitable share of infrastructure dollars and the audit we are debating today could shed light on whether they are getting just that.

We in the NDP strongly believe in public infrastructure and that it should remain truly public. Canadians need the federal government to invest in infrastructure that will make a real difference in their communities, not add money to the bank accounts of investment companies. The priority of corporations is not to simply provide infrastructure but to profit from it, yet for some reason the government keeps looking to put private investors and multinationals in control.

It is troubling to read, in the Canada Infrastructure Bank's five-year plan, that the bank aims to:

Develop mechanisms to engage private sector partners earlier in the project planning and design process to facilitate more commercially focused infrastructure decisions which can better support user-pay funding models...

The CIB's touting of its \$20-million pilot project in Mapleton, Ontario, where the bank is investing in the private delivery of public drinking water, shows its desire to expand privatization of basic public infrastructure. The fact is municipalities and the rest of the public sector are well equipped to deliver high-quality, cost-effective and safe public services. Federal investments should empower this role, not hand the keys over to private companies that will, undoubtedly, hike user fees and cut services.

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In closing, I will be voting in favour of the motion and, should it pass, I look forward to learning the answers to the questions I have posed here today.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am delighted to address you by this title for the first time. We have the pleasure of sitting on various committees together. I really appreciate the work you do, and I am sure that you will be an excellent Assistant Deputy Speaker, as you have been in the past.

I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. I would like to congratulate him for giving concrete and very pertinent examples.

[*English*]

My question is quite simple. During the member's speech, he talked about the so-called weak targets of the Harper government that were not good enough for Canada. May I remind the hon. colleague that those so-called weak targets were exactly the same as the Paris Agreement, so the so-called weak targets of the Harper government were accepted by the whole world in 2015.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I do not think very many people would agree that we are on track to meet any of our commitments under any international agreement. In fact, we are falling far short of where we need to be in terms of delivering deep and real reductions in climate pollution. We can debate different targets and our progress toward them, but I think most people would agree that we are falling far short and need to do more.

● (1205)

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to echo the comments of the member across the way. It is great to have you in the chair and I look forward to working with you in that position.

I welcome the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley to this place. He is presenting something that has many angles to it.

The member mentioned precast concrete being developed in rural Canada. I am thinking of chips from sawmill operations as biomass for some of the infrastructure projects that may end up in larger centres, the role that innovation plays in rural communities moving infrastructure forward and how to audit that.

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How might that be included in today's discussion? How do we include the developments from rural Canada contributing to infrastructure goals overall in the climate change goals that we have as the federal government?

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his warm welcome. I believe the question is how we can ensure that infrastructure investments in northern and rural Canada are contributing toward our climate goals. I believe there are many opportunities to do that.

In my home community of Smithers, we recently expanded and modernized our airport terminal. The new building is heated and cooled using a geo-exchange system that takes heat from the ground and dramatically reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

There are many projects across our region and across rural Canada that can contribute to that overall goal. The key is accountability and ensuring the reductions add up to our ambitions. It is one thing to talk about ambitions; it is another thing to show the math and ensure that we are meeting the targets we set for ourselves.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for his speech.

I would like to rephrase the question I asked earlier. With all due respect to the hon. member who answered my question, I found his response to be unclear. We often share the same views as our NDP colleagues when it comes to social issues. I would like to know whether the NDP is going to support our request to decentralize the funding and transfer infrastructure funding to Quebec with no conditions. This would allow decisions to be made by those who are closer to the situation and know the real needs, in other words, the Government of Quebec and the municipalities.

[*English*]

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the welcome. I believe the question is whether we support a loosening of conditions to ensure the funds flow. As a former mayor, I agree with the premise of his question, which is that local governments and the people who are closest to the community often have the clearest view of priorities and understand how best to deliver infrastructure projects. At the same time—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Thank you.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to this very important motion. I will be sharing my time with my friend, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*English*]

Never before has a prime minister boasted so loudly and spent so much to achieve so little with respect to infrastructure. Today is an incredible opportunity for this Parliament to really show, in a minority situation, just what it is capable of. Thank goodness for the

Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General, because it sounds like this Parliament is going to call for some accountability. After all, our job, not only as the opposition but also as parliamentarians, is to make sure we hold the government to account for its spending.

The debate on the motion started at 10 o'clock this morning. I will remind members of Parliament and those who are watching of what the motion states:

That, given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that “Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government’s \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan” and that the “PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist”, the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government’s Investing in Canada Plan, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises; and that the Auditor General of Canada report his findings to the House no later than one year following the adoption of this motion.

Transparency and accountability are precisely what the opposition is asking for today. I checked the mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and there are several references to what transparency and accountability will look like.

I will quote from the mandate letter, which states:

We will continue to deliver real results and effective government to Canadians. This includes: tracking and publicly reporting on the progress of our commitments; assessing the effectiveness of our work; aligning our resources with priorities; and adapting to events as they unfold, in order to get the results Canadians rightly demand of us.

It continues:

I also expect us to continue to raise the bar on openness, effectiveness and transparency in government. This means a government that is open by default.

It also states:

Ensure that Canadians have access to accurate and timely information about infrastructure investments in their communities, and work with your Cabinet colleagues to improve financial reporting to Canadians and the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

It further states:

We have committed to an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians, lives up to the highest ethical standards and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds. I expect you to embody these values in your work and observe the highest ethical standards in everything you do. I want Canadians to look on their own government with pride and trust.

When we look back at the infrastructure plan that was put into place by the government, it was an aggressive infrastructure plan. I will remind members and Canadians that back in 2015 the Prime Minister spoke about modest deficits to invest and grow our economy. Of course, we found out that plan was a \$186-billion plan over 12 years.

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However, the reality is that much of that money has not been put into the types of projects the government was planning on doing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that for every dollar that was proposed, 60 cents has not gone out. Therefore, on a scale of \$186 billion, we can imagine the magnitude of what has not gone on with respect to that infrastructure plan. That is precisely what we are hoping to find out through the Auditor General.

• (1210)

I will mention some facts on the infrastructure plan.

On failed spending, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has shown that the Liberals have failed to get their own infrastructure money out the door and that infrastructure money lapses at 60% per year for the first two years. One cannot force-feed infrastructure projects with unlimited amounts of money. Municipalities and provinces have to be ready for it and this just does not appear to be the case. There are so many potential infrastructure projects that could be funded that are not being funded.

He also found out that there have been no results. When the minister of infrastructure in the last Parliament was asked in the House of Commons how he was spending \$187 billion in infrastructure, he gave a very flippant answer. I do not even think the minister of infrastructure knew where that money was going.

There has been no new economic growth. In fact, the economy has slowed down. The Liberals claimed that their infrastructure spending would increase GDP by an average of 0.3% per year. In fact, at best, the PBO estimates that it fell short by 67%. This is a failed plan.

The truth is that nobody knows how much the government is spending on infrastructure. The Prime Minister does not know. The Parliamentary Budget Officer does not know. The Department of Finance does not know. Even the Department of Infrastructure does not know how much the government is spending on infrastructure. The opposition asked the PBO to reach out to the Department of Infrastructure to ask how much the government spends on infrastructure and it could not even answer the question.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that the government's infrastructure plan does not exist. He said that the investing in Canada plan is hopelessly mismanaged and improvised. The Prime Minister's greatest failure is when he promised, as the centrepiece of the 2015 campaign, to run temporary small deficits in order to invest in infrastructure that would grow the economy. The PBO analysis showed that despite all of the Prime Minister's spending, there was no incremental increase in infrastructure in Canada.

We are here today because there are lots of questions that need answers. We have seen over the course of the last four years many big cheque announcements across this country. David Akin of Global News had a program on social media that would follow government spending. There were billions and billions of dollars in announcements, but very little to back them up. That is precisely why the Auditor General is required to step up and provide to Parliament, on behalf of Canadians, an answer to where that money is going.

The other thing the Parliamentary Budget Officer spoke about was that deficits keep increasing and that infrastructure spending is accounted for within that deficit structure. If the government is not spending the money, where is that money going and why are those deficits continuing to increase? These are all very valid questions.

I will remind members that it is important to understand this is a critical issue. We need to understand this because wasteful spending, sky-high taxes and reckless borrowing are a result of incompetence in getting this infrastructure money out the door.

Last, in 2017 the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the Liberals had spent only half of the promised infrastructure money. In 2018, when the Parliamentary Budget Officer requested the Liberals' infrastructure plan be produced, he found it was a plan that did not exist. In 2019, when the Parliamentary Budget Officer requested a list of specific project commitments under the investing in Canada plan, the government was unable to provide the data.

Conservatives are calling on the Auditor General, who is an independent officer of Parliament, to ask the government for the data on where that money is going and what it is being spent on. If it is not being invested on things designed to grow the economy, as the Prime Minister said was the intent back in 2015, then all of us as Canadians and parliamentarians have a right to know what is happening with that money.

• (1215)

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his keen interest in matters of infrastructure. However, I lament that it appears to be negative attention that he is putting on our infrastructure plan. I guess I should not be surprised, given that the Conservative election platform committed to cutting \$18 billion from infrastructure funding.

When the Conservatives released that platform of cuts, the president of the FCM said the following:

Cities and communities across the country have an urgent need for increased investment in infrastructure. Proposed measures in this platform appear to move in the opposite direction, with fewer infrastructure dollars available year-over-year to create jobs, improve roads and bridges, and maintain the local services Canadians rely on.

Does the member still support his party's election platform and believe that Canada's path to prosperity lies in \$18 billion of cancelled infrastructure improvements?

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Speaker, I call into question what the hon. member is saying to the House. More importantly, if the government has made a commitment, as it has with its very aggressive commitment to infrastructure of \$186 billion over 10 years, at a minimum the majority of the money that was committed over the years that we have been here should at least have gone to those infrastructure projects, to those municipalities and those projects designed to grow the economy.

As the Parliamentary Budget Officer has clearly stated, that money has not gone out the door. In fact, a lot of announcements have been made, but very little in the way of that money has actually been allocated to the projects that the Prime Minister and the government have spoken to.

*Business of Supply*

It is important for the Auditor General to step in, find out exactly what has gone on and, if anything, help the government design a program for infrastructure that actually works.

• (1220)

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his re-election. I would like to focus my hon. colleague's attention on a particular type of infrastructure that is extremely important to urban Canada and the residents of my riding of Vancouver Kingsway, which is public transit.

My hon. colleague is familiar with the many salutary aspects of public transit, such as reducing congestion. Gridlock costs our economy billions of dollars a year, and moving people efficiently in urban and rural areas is a critically important aspect of dealing with climate change.

Does the member have any comments on that issue? What would he like to see the government do in terms of moving money faster and more productively out the door so that Canadians from coast to coast, businesses and our communities can get the public transit they so urgently need?

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Speaker, when I was a city councillor and former chair for infrastructure and transportation in the City of Barrie, we obviously advocated for increased funding for transit. Around areas like the GTA and the greater Vancouver area, it becomes important.

The government does have a mechanism through the gas tax funding, as I said in the last Parliament when we were debating an issue with respect to infrastructure. It is the one and only area where the federal government can have a direct input by allocating money to the gas tax that goes directly to those municipalities for the types of investments that the hon. member spoke to. It gives those municipalities a lot of latitude as well. They can invest the money in transit or in roads or in a whole set of criteria that relate to the gas tax fund.

When I brought it up, I remember the member for Trinity—Spadina, who is a former city councillor himself, cynically said that we do not want municipalities using it to reduce the tax rate. That is not what the gas tax rebate is all about and it is not what municipalities use it for. As a member of city council in Barrie, I can say that we did not use it to reduce the tax rate. As well, I know that the Town of Innisfil council does not use it for that reason either.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to come back to something the Liberals said that I would like my colleague to comments on.

During the last election campaign, we asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to cost our platform. However, when he asked Infrastructure Canada for a list of all of its commitments for specific projects under its program and their spending profiles, Infrastructure Canada replied that it was unable to provide that information.

It is not true that the Conservatives wanted to make cuts. We wanted to do things right and come up with a plan. The Liberals have no plan.

Does my colleague truly believe that this is the right way to manage Canada's infrastructure?

[*English*]

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Speaker, I will answer that question in a short manner: obviously not.

I think the words of the Parliamentary Budget Officer as they related to the Liberal infrastructure plan have been consistent, not just during the last Parliament but leading up to the election.

Yesterday we met with the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and there are still significant issues that need to be dealt with in terms of transparency and accountability, which is what the Auditor General will do.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to participate in this very important debate.

This issue, which was raised by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable, goes to the very heart of why we are here in the House, and that is to manage public funds and ensure that Canadians get the transparency they deserve when it comes to the tax dollars that the government collects and manages based on certain decisions and criteria. Our job is about management of public funds, transparency and accountability. That is at the heart of the debate we are having today.

Let us review the facts. The current government brags that it has invested more money in infrastructure than any other government in Canadian history, with a program worth \$186 billion over the next 12 years. That is technically true. No government in the history of Canada has invested as much. However, I will come back to the interesting and compelling history a little later.

In reality, this government lacks transparency and accountability when it comes to saying what it is doing with that money, who it is giving the money to and how the money is being managed, and that is unacceptable.

Let's not forget, this program is not small potatoes. It is a \$186-billion program. It involves 50 different programs, administered by 30 different departments, agencies and Crown corporations. In short, it is huge. However, the bigger something is, the more the devil is in the details. In this case, I can say that there are plenty of devils, but no details. With 50 programs and 30 departments, agencies and so on, it is enough to make anyone's head spin. Unfortunately, the government is dragging its heels on accountability.

*Business of Supply*

The Parliamentary Budget Officer examined this program several times over the past four years. Those people over there got themselves elected in 2015 by saying that everything would be terrific, but it cannot be said that the past four years have yielded significant results, much less transparent results. In 2017, the Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that half the funding that had been announced was unaccounted for. In 2018, the Parliamentary Budget Officer asked what the Liberal government's plan for infrastructure was, but there was no plan. In 2019, the Parliamentary Budget Officer requested a list of investing in Canada programs and projects, but there was no list.

During this program's first three years, the Parliamentary Budget Officer asked for basic information three times, and the government was not able to provide a proper response. That is why today's motion from my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable calls on the Auditor General to review this program. In the unfortunate event that the government refuses to answer opposition members' questions during question period, and refuses to give relevant information for the Parliamentary Budget Officer's investigations, we want the Auditor General to be able to come in and conduct a full audit of how this massive \$186-billion program is being managed over 12 years. Canadians must know what kind of impact the program is having and should at least feel that they are getting their money's worth.

As I mentioned earlier, this is not the first time that a government has invested in infrastructure. Sure, this is a massive and unprecedented amount of money, but this is not completely new. When we were in government, when we were facing the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the Conservative government dealt with this crisis by making some major investments and injecting \$47 billion into the Canadian economy over the first two or three years of the crisis.

That is why, under the Conservative government, Canada was the first G7 country to emerge from the economic crisis with the best debt-to-GDP ratio, the best growth and the lowest unemployment rate in the G7. That is the Conservative government's legacy. That is why we made good choices.

• (1225)

[*English*]

Let me remind the House that when we finished our mandate in 2015, we tabled a balanced budget. There was zero deficit in 2015. We were the first country in the G7 to have that, and thanks to the Hon. Denis Lebel, who was the minister of infrastructure at that time, we had a very ambitious program for infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

The Hon. Denis Lebel sat in this House for many years. His last office was not far from here. Under his watch, Canada had the most ambitious plan, which included investments of \$120 billion over 10 years and no deficits, unlike what the Liberal government has done. That was good management of public funds and the Conservative government's legacy. That is certainly not the Liberal government's legacy.

Spending money that we do not have and accumulating deficits is the worst thing you can do when the economy is growing, as is currently the case. Let us remember that in 2015 the Liberals came

to power by claiming that they would spend a lot of money on infrastructure and only run up small deficits of \$10 billion the first year, \$10 billion the second year, \$6 billion the third year and none in 2019.

The reality is quite different, as they ran up huge deficits for the first three years and an even larger deficit in the last year. That is what happened in the first four years of the Liberal government's tenure. Even though it promised that there would not be a deficit in 2019, it announced a deficit of \$19 billion. I will come back to that a little later.

The Liberals did not make the promised investments since less than 60% of every \$100 has been invested. They also hid information from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. What is more, they ran colossal deficits and broke their promise of zero deficit.

I want to come back to something more recent. Roughly five weeks ago, the House was sitting and we asked the Minister of Finance when he was planning to table his economic update. He said it was coming. Coincidentally, the Minister of Finance tabled that economic update on December 16, a day when the House was not sitting and for good reason. If I were in the Liberals' place, I too would have been embarrassed.

The \$19.8-billion deficit that was announced became an actual deficit of \$26.6 billion, missing the target by 37%. For the following year, a small deficit of \$19.7 billion was projected. However, it is more like \$28 billion, missing the target by 43%. The following year, the third year, a \$9.8-billion deficit was projected, but it is actually \$16.3 billion.

The first time, the target was missed by 37%, the second time by 43%, and the third time by 66%. I understand why the finance minister did not table the update in the House. I understand why he waited for the House to rise. It is shameful, embarrassing and unacceptable to mismanage public finances. Such is the hallmark of the Liberal government and the legacy that will be left by the Minister of Finance. It is such a shame.

Need I remind the Minister of Finance that, when he was a Bay Street baron, he made the family business a jewel of the Canadian economy? There is no shame in that, quite the contrary. While he managed the family business for 20 years, he never ran a deficit. However, he has been managing public finances for four years and he has run four deficits in a row. That is unacceptable, especially since he has no control over what is coming in the next few years.

Let us not forget, a deficit is a bill we send to our children and our grandchildren. Because the economy is going well at the moment, now is the time we should be making the important choices. As the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal's president, Michel Leblanc, said on LCN a month ago:

*Business of Supply*

What businesses are telling us is that they're worried. If the reckoning weighs too heavily on our businesses, taxes will go up, and consumers will stop showing up....

That is what happens when we spend money we do not have and send the bill to our grandchildren. There was even an editorial in *Le Devoir* that stated the following:

The Canadian economy is doing well.... But that is precisely why it would've been wise to take advantage of the situation and save up for a rainy day.... There's this lingering deficit that doesn't bother anyone when things are going well, but could turn into a huge obstacle in the event of a sharp downturn.

That is why the motion of the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, which we hope will be adopted by the House, will make it possible to shed some light on the current government's irresponsible management of Canadian public funds. The motion will also make it possible to determine whether Canadians are getting good value for their money. Above all, it will remind Canadians and the House that the current government was elected on the promise to run small deficits but is running large ones and that it was re-elected by promising to run deficits but it has completely lost control of the public purse. That is unacceptable for the future of the Canadian economy and especially for the future of our children and the new grandchild of the member for Mégantic—L'Érable who just came into this world.

• (1230)

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's intervention. In particular, he focused a little bit on how, after running deficit after deficit after deficit for years, the former Conservative government finally brought in a “surplus”. I am wondering what he can tell us about what the Conservatives had to do to get that surplus. Can the member talk a little bit about the services that were slashed to Veterans Affairs or the selling off of GM at bargain prices, for example?

More importantly, if this is the attitude that the Conservative Party is going to continue to take, which we have seen year after year in this place, can the member comment on where the further cuts of \$18 billion, as promised by the Conservative Party in the last election, would have come from? Where would the Conservatives have gone to get an additional \$18 billion in cuts? What services would they have cut to do that? Would they have continued down the path of cutting services to veterans?

• (1235)

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Madam Speaker, may I remind my hon. colleague that, contrary to what he said, the Conservatives tabled a platform that was accepted by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Each and every penny that we spent and the shots that we called for in our platform were accepted. That was not the case for the Liberal platform.

[Translation]

The government seems to have forgotten that it provided a rough estimate for its economic platform and that the Parliamentary Budget Officer did not approve it. In contrast, every penny of our platform was recognized and approved by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. That is realistic and responsible.

On that note, we would keep the investments in infrastructure but spread them out over time because that is the responsible thing to do.

What is the government doing? It is running deficit after deficit and passing the bill on to our grandchildren. That is irresponsible and it is the Liberal way.

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest. What really concerns me is that I remember in 2015, the Liberals made such beautiful promises about everything and they got elected. They were going to deal with the infrastructure crisis and it was the most beautiful plan we had ever seen. Then they set up the Infrastructure Bank with our finance minister, who is pretty much the finance minister for the 1%, and it turned into an open bar for the lobbyists to come in with no oversight.

The privatization of key public assets is what the Liberals have been spinning to their friends. One has only to look at the LRT in Ottawa, run by SNC-Lavalin, where it cannot even get the doors to open. It did not even meet the criteria, but they are friends of the Prime Minister.

Therefore, I am deeply concerned when I see that we cannot even account for billions of dollars. We do not even know where it is. I am also concerned that the Liberals are against oversight by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which is the one opportunity that we have as parliamentarians to get straight answers.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. Why does he think that the Liberal government came in with such good promises and ended up in such a cynical place?

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Madam Speaker, I would say it is because they are Liberals.

It is true. Based on history, the Liberal Party always said one thing and then would do exactly the reverse. If anyone knows about that, it is the NDP member. In 1974, the Liberal Party was elected saying there would be no control over taxes. The Prime Minister's father said that in 1974, while our party said that we had to have control.

What did the Liberals do in 1975? On October 8, if my memory is good, they called a shot on that. They said one thing and they did the reverse. Their history continues.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his kind words about my grandson, Clovis, who joined our family last week.

I also want to mention my colleague's interest in parliamentary history and the history of inter-party relations. He is very knowledgeable about all the important facts that have shaped Canadian parliamentary history.

Does he agree that this government will go down in Canadian history and that his soon-to-be-born grandson will one day speak of this government as Canada's biggest-spending government ever?

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Gérard Deltell:** Madam Speaker, the Fraser Institute recently reported that this government spends \$9,066 per person, topping the previous record. In fact, this government has spent more than those that were in power during the Second World War and the worst economic crisis ever. In a time of peace and economic growth, that is utterly unacceptable according to the Fraser Institute.

• (1240)

[*English*]

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for Surrey—Newton.

I thank the member for Mégantic—L'Érable for his motion. It is timely and important; timely, because we are beginning a pivotal decade in which Canadians are looking to governments to lead on climate action and foster clean growth; and important, because it allows me to talk about our government's vision for making Canada a global leader by transforming our economy and accelerating climate action all while creating well-paying, good jobs and keeping life affordable for Canadians. This is what our investing in Canada infrastructure plan seeks to do.

The results from our investments are there, with over one million new jobs created since we formed government in 2015 and historically low unemployment rates. As the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed in his 2018 report, the first phase of our plan helped to stimulate economic activity and job creation over its first two years.

Canada's resource economy is central to all of this as a way to enhance our environmental performance, create new wealth and generate the revenues we need to invest in our low-carbon future. This includes working with the provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous communities to create a clean energy future, drive new economic opportunities in rural and northern communities, develop a cleaner transportation sector through zero-emission vehicles and the deployment of charging infrastructure across the country, and build modern trade and transportation routes to ensure we can get our resources to markets at home and abroad.

I would like to use the rest of my time today to talk about these four specific areas and how the investing in Canada infrastructure plan is playing a critical role to advance each of them.

The first is a clean energy future. We will not need meet our climate change targets unless we are using more clean electricity throughout our national economy, especially in energy-intensive sectors such as transportation and heating, as well as our traditional resource sectors. On this front, Canada is well positioned for continued success. Almost 82% of our electricity already comes from clean, non-emitting sources. In fact, we are the second-largest producer of hydro power on the planet. Wind and solar are now the fastest-growing sources of electricity generation in Canada.

We are supporting clean energy projects across the country through our emerging renewable power, smart grid and energy-efficient programs, which are investments that are creating jobs and new opportunities in the clean economy. In Saskatchewan, we are providing over \$25 million for the first of its kind geothermal facility, which will produce enough energy to power approximately

5,000 homes. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, we are supporting a project to incorporate renewable energy into the electricity grid in Shediac, New Brunswick and Amherst, Nova Scotia, creating jobs and lowering energy costs. Over the coming years, we will drive emissions down even further through new, zero-carbon electricity generation and transmission systems as well as modern smart grids and by connecting those provinces that have abundant clean energy to those that want and need it.

The investing in Canada infrastructure plan is helping us to do all of that as we seek to make Canada home to the cleanest mills, mines and factories in the world. In addition, by investing in innovative approaches to electricity distribution, including strategic entities, smart grids and storage, we can keep rates affordable for consumers and reduce carbon emissions. This is a win-win for the economy and the environment.

Second, we are using our historic infrastructure funding to help create new economic opportunities in rural, remote and indigenous communities. This includes connecting communities to existing power grids or constructing entirely new sources of cleaner energy so they can start turning off their diesel generators and start planning for a stronger, more sustainable future. For example, many indigenous communities are increasingly relying on biomass from forests as a source of both power and jobs. Others are building solar farms, and some are operating small hydro power facilities that they now want to expand. Through our investing in Canada infrastructure plan, we are helping to fund these clean energy futures while advancing indigenous reconciliation and creating sustainable jobs and growth.

• (1245)

A third key area is zero-emission vehicles.

Canadians want more options and cleaner choices for their transportation needs. They told us so through Generation Energy, the largest national discussion on energy in our country's history, and we are supporting them.

The transportation sector accounts for almost 25% of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions and three-quarters of those emissions come from just two sources: passenger cars and trucks, and heavy-duty vehicles. That is why we are helping to establish a coast-to-coast network of fast chargers for electric vehicles as well as chargers in the communities where Canadians work, live and play.

*Business of Supply*

We are also supporting new natural gas stations along key freight corridors to reduce emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and hydrogen stations in our metropolitan centres.

All of these actions are aimed at providing Canadians with more options and cleaner choices for their transportation needs, and all with the goal of ensuring that every vehicle sold in Canada in 2040 will produce zero emissions.

To reach this target, we are also making zero-emission vehicles more affordable. We have introduced incentives, including rebates of up to \$5,000 for Canadians buying eligible electric and hydrogen-fuelled vehicles, as well as an immediate 100% writedown for businesses purchasing zero-emission vehicles to green their fleets.

As our government begins its second mandate, we are raising the bar again and taking more action with a plan to help build up to 5,000 charging stations along the Trans-Canada Highway and other major road networks in urban centres and rural communities.

That brings me to the fourth key area: modernizing our trade and transportation routes.

It is a core responsibility of the federal government to help get our natural resources to market and to ensure that our resource sectors remain a source of jobs, prosperity and opportunity in a world that is increasingly demanding that raw materials and finished goods are not just competitively priced but sustainably and inclusively produced. Our investing in Canada plan is helping us do just that.

We have been accelerating infrastructure investments in marine ports as well as rail and highway corridors to remove bottlenecks and provide new opportunities for Canadian businesses to get their products to international markets.

We have also been improving access to transportation data in order to help shippers optimize their routes and to help governments better target their investments to make supply chains more efficient.

All of our investments in infrastructure are helping Canada build a modern, resilient and green economy, as well as a cleaner environment for a brighter, more prosperous future for generations to come.

I am proud to support our government's efforts and I urge all members of the House to join us. Together, we can create the prosperity we all want while protecting the planet that we all cherish.

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Madam Speaker, it has been noted by HealthCareCAN, which represents hospitals and health care organizations across this country, that we have a \$15-billion deficit with respect to maintaining hospitals. Hospitals use 11% of public infrastructure energy and 5% of Canada's greenhouse gases are emitted by hospitals. It also noted that 48% of hospitals are over 50 years old and 69% of hospitals in our cities are over 50 years old. They must operate in disaster conditions, such as fires, floods, earthquakes or viral outbreaks. Hospital and health care organizations are ineligible for federal funding from the Building Canada fund, the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, and the knowledge in infrastructure fund.

Does the member not think that it is time for the federal government to put money into this crucial part of our society to rebuild our health care infrastructure, to make sure that it is resilient in a time of climate change and when we need to be prepared for disaster and disaster mitigation?

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned hospitals and their aging infrastructure. Building hospitals and running hospitals is under the complete control of provinces. Money is transferred to each province through the health accord. Provinces decide if they want to replace some of their infrastructure, whether it be a hospital, a clean water project or bridges, or if they want to do road maintenance. It is not the federal government's place to tell provincial governments which project to apply for to get support. We encourage them to try and keep up their infrastructure.

I look forward to any application from any province getting approval to go ahead and get on with it, whether it be a health care facility or a clean water project.

• (1250)

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador speaks very eloquently. However, I want to question him on some of the government's interventions so far on this debate today. The government seems to be reluctant to have the Auditor General, who is really the custodian of public finances across the country, to look at and evaluate the many problems we have had with infrastructure funding. I would like him to comment on that.

The second issue is the fact that we have seen members of the government say that infrastructure is very complicated and that is why tens of billions of dollars have not been effectively allocated. At the same time, the same Liberal government came up with, in 24 hours, \$4.5 billion for the Trans Mountain pipeline, an old leaky pipeline that was losing money. The government had no hesitation in coming up with that money.

My question for my colleague is quite simple. Why is it so complicated when it is in the public good and the public interest to provide the infrastructure funding, but the government is so quick to approve billions of dollars when it is in the corporate interest?

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** Madam Speaker, my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby mentioned the infrastructure deficit and how hard it was to get projects approved. As a former councillor and mayor in my hometown, it is not easy to get projects approved just by saying we want to do something.

The infrastructure money for my home community is based on a one-third/one-third/one-third funding envelope. Therefore, the community can apply to do a various number of projects, the province then has to oversee that as well be a partner in it and then forward that in an application to the federal government to be a partner in it as well. Therefore, we cannot control what projects communities actually apply for or what ones they do not apply for. Who are we to tell municipalities what projects they should move forward with?

As well, municipalities such as my municipality have a limited amount of funding. They cannot afford to do all the projects all at once or even to apply for them all at once. Therefore, they pick the most important, most strategic project that fits the town or municipality at the time, and hope they get them picked off one at a time.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Avalon for splitting his time with me.

I am very happy to speak to the motion proposed by the official opposition. I am happy because it is asking for something that has already been done, so it makes my job easier.

The government welcomes any scrutiny of its infrastructure investments, be it from the Auditor General or anyone else. The opposition likes to trash-talk Canada. Just yesterday, a leadership candidate for the opposition party said that Canada was not working.

Those members seem not to have noticed that our Liberal government has helped Canadians create over one million jobs in the last four years and unemployment is lower than it has been in a generation. Canada has the fastest-growing economy of all G7 nations. The opposition members dismiss the hard work of Canadians who have built a country and an economy that is among the best in the world, and with this motion, they are casting aspersions on a program that, with our provincial partners, is helping Canadians build a better Canada.

Building a better Canada is something with which the Conservatives may be unfamiliar, given the previous government's cuts to important investments in infrastructure, health care and social programs.

Building a better Canada is something with which our government is very familiar. We have lifted 300,000 children out of poverty. Billions of dollars have been invested in affordable housing and infrastructure investments throughout Canada.

In Surrey alone, since 2015, we have invested over \$7 million in classroom space at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and \$125 million to build a new sustainable energy and environmental engineering building at SFU, Surrey.

We have invested over \$1 billion to expand our Skytrain in Surrey. We have delivered over 106 new clean-energy buses and we are replacing the aging Skytrain cars. Residents in Surrey are also going to benefit from the widening of Highway 1, in which we invested \$100 million in federal infrastructure funding.

We have invested in our families, with \$600,000 for the Newton Recreation Centre and Surrey Art Gallery.

### *Business of Supply*

Most important, our social infrastructure is being strengthened by the Canada child benefit. It is helping nearly 14,000 families in my constituency of Surrey—Newton, with an average monthly benefit of \$630 a month; that is \$8.7 million helping parents and children lead strong healthy lives.

Those are just a few examples of how our government's \$180-billion infrastructure plan is up and running. Funding has been approved for thousands of projects across the country, from small-scale jobs worth as little as a few thousand dollars to large-scale billion-dollar projects. By 2028, the investing in Canada plan will have invested more than \$180 billion, split between the investments in new programs and funding for existing initiatives.

Though some concerns remain about the flow of funding, and I understand the Conservatives have brought them forward, we have made significant progress. It appears one of the programs is almost complete. Over 90% of the projects are either under way or have been completed.

• (1255)

The Building Canada fund is delivered with the provinces, territories and municipalities that must be ready to put shovels in the ground.

The complaints by the opposition members portray a wilful and deliberate lack of understanding of how infrastructure funding works. They do it to score cheap political points, not to help make life better for Canadians. As they well know, construction can begin as soon as a project is approved for federal funding. Communities are reimbursed for reasonable expenses and federal dollars flow at the rate construction occurs, after invoices are submitted for reimbursement not before.

The opposition members know this, but politically driven forgetfulness seems to have taken hold on that side of the House. The long-term plan we put in place with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners will meet their infrastructure investment needs. The money is there, and we encourage all provinces and territories to work with their municipalities to define their priorities and bring projects forward for federal approval so no one misses the upcoming construction season.

We are ready to start building.

We would welcome the Auditor General's examination of our investments, because, unlike the Conservatives, we are not building fake lakes, gazebos or roads to nowhere. We are building the infrastructure our country needs to keep Canada moving forward. Unlike the Conservatives, who campaigned on cutting billions of dollars from much-needed infrastructure projects across the country, our Liberal government knows that good infrastructure improves the lives of Canadians, creates jobs and grows our economy.

*Business of Supply*

We know that investing in the infrastructure needs of coming decades will help our country adapt to the changing climate and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

In the recent election campaign, the Conservatives promised billions of dollars in cuts to much-needed infrastructure projects. These cuts would have had a deep impact in every corner of our country, which is why Canadians rejected them.

Our government knows and Canadians know that good infrastructure improves lives, creates jobs and grows our economy. It will also help mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We are building the infrastructure our country needs to keep Canada moving forward.

Partnerships are essential to build communities and to improve the quality of life of all Canadians. We have worked closely with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous peoples to develop our ambitious infrastructure plan, which has helped many communities. It is sad that the opposition is content to stay on the sidelines, throwing stones.

● (1300)

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC):** Madam Speaker, in 2015, the Liberals were elected on a promise to run small deficits in order to invest in infrastructure. It is now 2020. The deficits are enormous, and promises to invest \$188 billion in infrastructure have not been kept.

I am not the one saying so. The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that overall growth in public infrastructure spending has not changed. Billions of taxpayer dollars that were promised for infrastructure have gone missing.

Can my colleague tell us how his government lost track of those billions of dollars?

[English]

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Madam Speaker, if the member for Beauce came to Surrey and talked to the mayor, councillors and the people of Surrey, they would tell the hon. member about the benefits they have received through the infrastructure investments, whether it was investments in the Simon Fraser University campus in Surrey, the Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, the SkyTrain moving through Surrey or the widening of Highway 1. All of those projects, whether small or large, are helping community needs. I am very proud of the work that our government has done.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Surrey—Newton for his speech.

We are talking a lot about investments. In his speech, the member repeated that the money is there. The reality on the ground, however, is that many projects are being blocked because the federal government is imposing conditions that are far too strict.

I wonder if my colleague from Surrey—Newton can explain why the government continues to stubbornly insist on strict conditions rather than transfer the money directly to Quebec and let the people

on the ground, in other words, the Quebec government and its municipalities, manage their priorities. Needs vary widely from one municipality to the next, and the government cannot know what they are from its ivory tower in Ottawa.

Can my colleague explain that to us?

● (1305)

[English]

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Madam Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to Parliament.

I want to make it very clear that our government's approach has always been to work with municipalities and provincial and territorial governments to deliver projects, because municipalities know very well what the needs are in their communities. That is where it starts. They are the ones that take their needs and projects to the provinces. I am sure it is the same in Quebec. Once a project is approved, we as the federal government do not delay, providing funding right away so that shovels can be put in the ground. If there are any suggestions for changes, I am certain the minister would be open to making them to help Quebec and Quebec municipalities do better.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I find the exchanges about the collaboration between the Government of Canada and municipalities to be particularly interesting. The member from Beauce probably knows that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has said that in the past four years the Liberal government has been the best partner for all municipalities.

Can the member for Surrey—Newton, who is very familiar with his municipalities' issues, give examples of federal investments in partnership with the municipalities in his region?

[English]

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. minister for his leadership when it comes to my constituency of Surrey—Newton, where we created 176 affordable housing units that were much needed in my community. That happened in collaboration with the provincial government. This is the type of leadership we like to have from across the aisle when it comes to—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to note that I am splitting my time with the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

*Business of Supply*

Before I get into my speech, I want to correct the record. The President of the Treasury Board just indicated that the FCM is absolutely thrilled with the party on the other side. I would say there is a lot of hesitation from the mayors, councillors and reeves I have spoken to across the country. They are quite disappointed in the way that money has flowed from the government and think that the government's communication back and forth on when exactly they will get that money has been a problem. I am sure he would be happy to accept my correction to the record.

Infrastructure impacts all Canadians on a daily basis. It is the roads we drive on, the public buildings we use and the parks we bring our children to. It is a large component of any government's budget, yet the current government seems unsure of how much funding has gone out the door to support infrastructure development.

In 2015, the Liberals promised that they would run modest deficits of less than \$10 billion over the two years that followed and make historic investments in infrastructure. They have already failed on the modest deficits front. The deficit this year alone is estimated to be more than \$26 billion. The government does not seem to have a plan to get the budget back to balance, but that is a different debate for a different day.

The government introduced the investing in Canada plan, a \$188-billion plan to update infrastructure based on the priorities the government had. The government failed to work with the provinces to ensure they were shared priorities. Almost right away there were problems with the plan.

A March 2018 report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that only half of the spending promised to be invested in infrastructure had been tied to projects. After this finding was published, the government shuffled its cabinet and the next minister of infrastructure was urged in his mandate letter to stop the current lag with regard to infrastructure projects and get more money out the door. The government knew it was failing to meet expectations.

Reports from the Parliamentary Budget Officer kept coming. Another report found provinces were not investing as much in infrastructure as the federal government had estimated. This is a result of the federal government's not consulting with provinces when developing its investing in Canada plan.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer also ran into roadblocks when conducting research for its reports. After a request, Infrastructure Canada was unable to provide the data requested regarding a list of all the specific project commitments under the investing in Canada plan.

That is why we need the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government's plan. The department that should have a thorough list of all the projects in its own plan cannot provide it. Canadians deserve to know how their money is being spent.

I have seen first-hand how the incompetence of the government's infrastructure plan has been impacting Canadians. For the past year and a half, I have had the opportunity to travel across Canada and visit mayors and councillors in rural and urban municipalities. I

have spoken to municipal leaders from all provinces and territories to get their feedback on the current infrastructure plan.

One of the biggest things I heard during these discussions was that money needed for crucial infrastructure was stuck in Ottawa and that the federal government is not listening to local concerns. This Ottawa-knows-best approach is not working for municipalities. We need to streamline infrastructure and need a government that acts in the best interest of local communities on matters of infrastructure.

Many of these municipal representatives told me that they have yet to see any promised infrastructure funding flow into the areas. They have put in the requests and sometimes do not even hear back from the federal government. Mayors and councillors want more control over their projects. They want to decide what gets done instead of having bureaucrats, sometimes thousands of kilometres away, choose what to prioritize.

Many of the municipalities I consulted have said online application forms to receive infrastructure spending are so complicated that some have even given up entirely. Imagine having the sole beneficiaries of funding not even bother to apply for funding because it has been made too difficult. Instead, these municipalities are looking for other sources of funding to get their projects built.

The government also founded the Canada Infrastructure Bank, a \$35-billion agency designed to attract private investors to create public infrastructure projects. Despite costing so much money, we have seen very little in the way of announcements from the bank. In fact, the first announcement from this bank came more than two years after its establishment and it was just a reannouncement of funding that the government had already pledged.

● (1310)

Despite not accomplishing much, the infrastructure bank has had no problem asking for more money from the federal government to cover salaries, legal services, travel and other expenses. Announcements from the bank are sparse and the government has not yet been transparent about what the bank is actually achieving for Canadians.

Not all Canadians will even benefit from the Canada Infrastructure Bank. The finance minister confirmed that small municipalities will not benefit because investors will look to invest only, in his words, in "large transformational projects" that Maclean's notes will "produce a revenue stream, from which they can earn a high rate of return on their investment." As well, the bank will only provide funding to projects worth \$100 million or more, virtually guaranteeing that rural communities across Canada will not qualify, while small and medium-sized municipalities are losing \$15 billion of infrastructure money to pay for the bank.

It is clear that the government is not listening to Canadians and is being unresponsive to concerns about the investing in Canada plan. Instead, it is continuing to forge ahead with a plan that has very obvious shortcomings.

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The government knows its plan is failing too. In budget 2019, Liberals allocated a \$2.2-billion top-up in municipal transfers to fund short-term infrastructure projects for the year, which, as we all know, happened to be an election year. This was despite having the previous four years in government to address delays in delivering this much-needed infrastructure.

I am anticipating that some of my colleagues across the aisle will accuse our party of wanting to cut infrastructure funding, but that is simply not true. Our previous government's record speaks for itself. Our economic action plan approved and announced \$12 billion in infrastructure projects in three years of government during the worst economic crisis in a generation. We understand how important infrastructure is to Canadians. We understand the need to get dollars out the door as quickly as possible so projects can be completed in more reasonable time lines. Cutting infrastructure funding is not in our country's best interest.

The government also promised that the investing in Canada plan would stimulate the economy. The Liberals promised they would raise the level of real GDP by up to 1% in the 2017-18 fiscal year. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that there was no increase in the level of real GDP from infrastructure in Canada.

Their record on infrastructure is one of failure. They failed to match infrastructure funding with projects preferred by the municipalities. They failed to keep the deficits modest. They failed to grow the economy in the way that they promised to Canadians. They failed to be accountable and transparent.

When asked for details about the program, they cannot provide them. The department itself has an idea of how many infrastructure investments have been made. The Parliamentary Budget Officer could not get the facts. We have no idea how billions of dollars in taxpayer money is being spent.

The Auditor General must audit the investing in Canada plan to verify whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises. My guess is that it is not.

• (1315)

**Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his attention to the matter before us. There seems to be a short memory here. The member emphatically stated that no cuts to infrastructure spending were proposed by his party, but the platform for the Conservative Party clearly indicated an \$18-billion cut to infrastructure funding.

Be that as it may, we welcome a review by the Auditor General of the infrastructure plan. In fact, the only thing we have an objection to today is the motion's preamble, which mis-characterizes the Auditor General's report because it refers to an outdated report. That was a superseded report. The auditor's report from 2018 clearly says that we are delivering the plan we said we would. By the way, we also delivered one million jobs for Canadians with the lowest unemployment rate in 40 years, and optimism is very high across the country. I am sorry that this confidence is being undermined.

Perhaps the member wishes to have a do-over on not supporting the amendment so that we could all vote for this welcome review of the infrastructure plan.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Madam Speaker, colour me shocked that the member does not like the part of the motion that tells him that the government has failed. Be that as it may, we certainly seem to have a different memory of what has happened in the past four years.

I took six months to go across the country leading up to the election and heard time and time again about these delays in infrastructure funding. As I said in my speech, we are absolutely not interested in cutting infrastructure funding. That is what our Canadian municipalities have asked for. However, under the government they cannot even get the funding.

As the member has accused us of cutting the funding, I would remind him that it is the reason we are here today. We do not know what his plan says. We do not know the dollar amounts in his plan. That is why we need the Auditor General to give us a thorough review of the investing in Canada plan.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, over the years, I have seen all kinds of egregious abuses by the Conservatives and Liberals. When they say they are going to work with us, it is like being invited by a crocodile to come down and have a nice little luncheon by the riverside.

The Liberals are saying we should be nice to them and trust them and they will smother us like Teletubbies. However, what I have been really concerned about with the government, despite all the smiles, is the undermining of the officers of Parliament. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is the one tool we have for accountability. If we cannot find billions of dollars in infrastructure spending, I am sorry, I am not going to trust the Liberals. I trust the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I would like to bring this to the point of when the Ethics Commissioner investigated the Prime Minister with respect to SNC-Lavalin and was denied documents by the Prime Minister's Office under the issue of cabinet confidentiality.

How can we investigate a government if it refuses to turn over the main documents to the parliamentary officers who work for all of us? They do not work for individual parties, the opposition or the government. They work for the people of Canada. Therefore, this motion is very important, because we need the Parliamentary Budget Officer to not be interfered with or undermined by the smiling Teletubbies or perhaps, behind those Teletubbies, the alligators in the Prime Minister's Office.

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Madam Speaker, time and again in the last Parliament we saw egregious attacks on the independent officers, particularly the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who kept trying to help the government by putting forward these reports, yet the government continued on the same path. At the very last minute it realized it was a failed path, so it quickly shoved \$2 billion into a fund to get gas tax money out the door. That in itself shows that this is a failure and, if it wants to work with us across the aisle, the Liberal government needs to pay attention to the independent officers, like the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who are here to help all parliamentarians.

• (1320)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I appreciate this motion brought forward by the Conservative Party today focusing on the parliamentary budget office quote about infrastructure lapses. I wonder if this is a more generic problem than a political problem, because I see in the report from the PBO that infrastructure spending promised before 2016 seems to have had the same problem. In other words, legacy infrastructure programs are prone to a 24% lapse rate, and infrastructure projects had a 33% lapse rate in 2016-17. I think this is an important issue. What does the member think are the reasons for the lapses, and could they be much more structural than political?

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux:** Madam Speaker, that is essentially what we need to get to the bottom of. I think the member raises probably the most important point in infrastructure funding in this country, which is looking at structural and budgetary problems. That is what we are hoping the Auditor General will do as part of this report. We have to look forward to work together.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Edmonton Riverbend for sharing his time with me this afternoon in the chamber.

I want to thank the House of Commons staff for their warm and helpful welcome over the course of the last three months. I have had many constituents and colleagues ask me how my experience has been as a newly elected member, and the line I keep using is that it is like a baptism by blowtorch. However, it has been a wonderful experience and I have enjoyed it all very much. The House leadership team, colleagues and staff have made a big change into a new role very manageable, and I appreciate that very much.

This being my maiden speech today, I would like to divert a little and put a few thanks into the record. First, I want to thank the wonderful constituents of the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry for the wonderful honour they have given me to serve in the House. This was literally a childhood dream of mine. The first time I sat here in the chamber was with my aunt. She worked for the House of Commons and I was able to sit in the Prime Minister's chair about 20-some years ago. I think I got the political bug, if not before then, certainly that night being in the chamber for the first time.

I want to thank my family, who has been so supportive, not only in this new journey but my entire 32 years here: my mom Bea, my father Ed, my sister Jill, and for those who wonder how I get a thick skin in politics, my five stepsisters. They have been a wonderful

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family of support and a family network for me, and I am grateful for them and all that they do and continue to do for me.

I also want to acknowledge my predecessor, who served in this House as a Conservative member of Parliament for 15 years, Guy Lauzon. Many would know Guy over the years. He served as national Conservative caucus chair and in government served as parliamentary secretary in a couple of roles. He was known in our riding for setting the bar quite high, for being approachable, for being out in the community and for the customer service he offered in the office. He certainly set the bar for me, as well as for other people in our community, for being in public life, being accessible and offering that customer service.

It is very fitting that I have the opportunity to speak today to our opposition day motion about infrastructure, because one of my predecessor's great legacies was the amount of money he was able to secure and bring home to Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry under a Conservative government.

Many ask how he and Frances are doing today. Frances is in good health, and I appreciate all the members who are asking how she is doing. Both of them are loving their time down in Florida this winter. When people ask what Guy is doing these days, I say that he is enjoying his role as the hon. member of Parliament for Fort Myers, Florida, this winter and doing well there.

I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to represent the people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Today, I will say a few words in French for my francophone friends living in my riding. French is my second language and I am working on improving it. I understand the importance of Canada's two languages. Many people in my riding speak French. Next week I will be starting a French course.

[*English*]

There is no shortage of files in our riding that are going to need attention over the course of this upcoming Parliament. We have seen news reports, have heard questions asked in the House and there have been meetings within the Conservative caucus and outreach from some members of government, which I appreciate, about the water levels in Lake St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River. That goes all the way across Ontario and Quebec. I know it is a challenge not only during the spring but throughout the year.

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In my riding, between Iroquois and Cornwall, we generally have the opposite problem that many communities have. When there are high water levels present in the Great Lakes or in Montreal, we often have low water levels, which creates environmental, economic and property damage concerns. I want to thank the many people who have reached out to me so far and have been briefing me and giving me their perspectives locally, across the province and across the region on that file.

Being from a rural riding, I understand that agriculture is very important. I do not think a day went by during my campaign, and even now as a newly elected member, when I was not talking about the importance of supply management in our agricultural sector. I support that day in and day out, whether in the House as we work with other countries on trade deals or whatever it may be. Agriculture is the backbone of my riding. If it is not supply management, it is our grains and oilseeds farmers, and the global markets are a challenge I look forward to working on.

I want to acknowledge, and look forward to working with, the Minister of Transport and Transport Canada, as the city of Cornwall, Akwesasne and neighbouring communities are going to be dealing with some surplus land on the waterfront of Cornwall.

That presents such an opportunity for the city of Cornwall, to have those lands for public use and for myriad different uses. It can unlock a lot of potential in terms of public spaces and in terms of economic development for the city, and for the people of Akwesasne across the river in our region to benefit. I look forward to it. Regardless of what side of the House members are on, it is really an issue on which we could find co-operation and deliver a positive outcome for my riding.

We talk about the opposition day motion here today. Getting action on any of those files I just talked about, and on infrastructure projects, takes co-operation. I am not naive. I understand that I am on this side of the House and not the government side of the House, and that is going to take co-operation. However, I also think, as an early observer here in the House, there have been some great working relationships.

I want to acknowledge a neighbouring colleague of mine, the Liberal member of Parliament for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. Shortly after the election, a mutual friend of ours connected us by text message. I went into his riding and we had a wonderful lunch in Alexandria at the Quirky Carrot. I was very pleased at the end of the lunch when the member offered to buy lunch that day. I said he did not have to, and he said, “You’re in my riding, I’ll buy you lunch today. When you come to my riding, I will buy you lunch.” I told the member I have been saving up my McDonald’s coupons since then for a visit to Cornwall.

However, it has been the start of a good, productive bipartisan working relationship. I appreciate his advice as we talk about infrastructure, agricultural issues and a big issue in eastern Ontario, which I know several colleagues in our party are very interested in, the Eastern Ontario Regional Network. We have been improving broadband and have made some investments as a Conservative government supported by the current government, but there is a lot more to do. I have been very proud of the advocacy that we have been doing, and many members of the House on both sides have

been doing, to improve cell capacity all across rural eastern Ontario.

In my time left, speaking specifically about the opposition day motion, I strongly support the motion being brought forward. My background before I became a member of Parliament was serving as a mayor in the Township of North Dundas and serving on county council and as warden of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

Frankly, over the course of the last couple of years when I have spoken to my successors on county council, local councils in my riding and all parts of the province of Ontario and beyond, people were not seeing those dollars get to the front lines of where they need to go. It is a challenge that, when money is announced, municipalities try to get their projects ready and they just do not happen. It is a bigger and bigger challenge the more I see the government not react to this.

A perfect example is the Ontario-Canada infrastructure fund. I will use a project in my riding as an example. I had the honour of standing in the House in December and asking the minister a question about this. A project in my riding that has applied for funding is the Morrisburg streetscape project. That is a project with the Municipality of South Dundas and the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

They applied for that program nearly a year ago. We were very pleased to see the Ontario government go through and approve that project back in July and have been waiting ever since for an answer and an okay from the federal government on that project. It creates a big challenge because, if the federal funding could have come through in July, the communities might have been able to get shovels in the ground and get the RFPs going out for that project to happen this year. The challenge is now that it is going to be February next week, municipal budgets are being done and completed, and they are not sure if that one-third is there.

Municipalities are a mature level of government. They do asset management plans. They know what their priorities are. My colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador across the aisle, who spoke a few minutes ago, had experience at the municipal level and was talking about those one-third, one-third, one-third partnerships, which I agree are great. They have been supported by all parties over the past several parliaments. However, if the dollars are not flowing and there is not a good process when the announcements are made, those billions of dollars are not getting to the municipalities. It is not being effective.

I support the motion for the Auditor General to take a look. I would encourage my colleagues on the government side. It is either going to confirm that there is a problem, or it will debunk a myth. There is a problem there, from what I see and hear in my riding, and I respect the work of the Auditor General, as all members of the House do. I look forward to supporting this motion, seeing that report and seeing what we can do better to support municipalities, and get the dollars to municipalities and shovels in the ground.

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• (1330)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, what is really concerning me in representing regions in northern Ontario is that many of our communities are completely dependent on winter roads. However, right now, because of changes in weather, the winter roads are not operating, which means that the supplies that are needed for the entire year are not getting into communities. That will create an economic catastrophe in communities, whether it is Pikangikum, Cat Lake or Kashechewan, where we are trying to deal with the crisis of a lack of basic housing.

One of the opportunities we have is to commit to permanent roads that will run up through northern Canada, particularly in Treaty 9 and particularly along the coast of James Bay. We see on the Quebec side that they have built the roads up, and the difference between poverty on the Quebec side and poverty on my side is night and day because of the infrastructure.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he supports making long-term investments to bring indigenous communities out of the fourth world by building the roads they need so that we can get supplies in at a reasonable rate.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly about the need for infrastructure.

As I mentioned in my comments, when infrastructure projects are advocated by first nations communities and municipalities, they are the ones who are on the front lines every day dealing with those infrastructure concerns.

There is a ripple effect. It is not only the roads and bridges that need to be built in the short term, but it is having year-round access to those communities, whether for food or economic development. Whatever the means, method and benefit may be, there are a lot. Therefore, I think we need to rely more on them and get rid of this red tape and these delays in getting infrastructure dollars out the door.

We can rely on the judgment and expertise of those who are living in those communities every day and who know their priorities. If the local government says it is a priority and the provincial government then approves it, there does not need to be another six, eight or nine months of waiting and reporting and analyzing. We should trust the mature level of government of municipalities to get this done, but frankly, over the course of the last four years, we have not seen that method in use at all.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I welcome the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, who is a new arrival to this House. We look forward to working with him and to supporting his constituents.

My question is this: How does he interpret the fact that in the last four years, this government approved four times as many projects as the previous Conservative government in its last four years?

• (1335)

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I talked to municipalities in my riding, and while I was a mayor for part of the last Parliament's term, I saw that dollars were not getting to the front line. I am not sure if they are going to members' ridings on the government side

or larger urban centres, but I am speaking from my background as a rural mayor in my previous role. I see some colleagues on this side of the aisle here, such as the members for Parry Sound—Muskoka, Simcoe—Grey and Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. They also saw these challenges in their previous roles. The dollars are not getting there.

The applications are coming in, but they are being delayed and stalled. We can look at the Morrisburg streetscape project or at my neighbouring riding in eastern Ontario, the township of North Grenville and the town of Kemptville. It has been years and years of waiting. The municipality has applied and asked for the dollars and the provincial government has given the okay, but it has just been silence for eight months.

There is no need for these delays. If the dollars are there, put the dollars out and let us get shovels in the ground. I will say in a bipartisan way that I believe we can be better and smarter in terms of the timelines.

We are now almost in February. It would be great if these projects were approved today with a nod of the head and an agreement was signed. I am sure we can make that happen. However, even now, to get the budgets finalized and get the RFPs out and the shovels in the ground, we are seriously jeopardizing another year of projects getting started in a lot of rural municipalities that I see.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board said that the government deserves a lot of credit for all of the new projects. However, we should be mindful that it was the Conservative government that actually added an inflationary measure and legislated the gas tax so that every year there would be more money for important infrastructure. That is something that was put in place.

The government talks about its Canada summer jobs program, but what it did was take two weeks off each individual job and then funnel that money to be able to say, "Look how much more we are doing." We cannot safely take the words and rhetoric of the government seriously. We have to look at results.

Could the member tell me what he would like to see as a former elected municipal mayor? What concrete measures does he want to see from the government moving forward?

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Madam Speaker, I spoke before about timely responses to infrastructure requests from municipalities and the lag that is happening, the delays and the lost construction seasons. Simply from a bureaucratic aspect, when projects are applied for, there are often technical asset management plans. Municipalities plan for years in advance at the request of federal and provincial governments to get those projects all in order and all in line. There are many ways we can do this. Again, it is about providing predictable funding.

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A line that I always use is that a lot of these announcements are about a mile wide and an inch deep when they come. There is flash, there is substance, there are the photo ops. There are all those things, but getting the dollars there is something we can certainly improve on.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

As we all know, we are in a minority Parliament, and in a minority Parliament, Canadians are looking for us to co-operate across party lines. We all say that. That involves efforts on all sides and it involves efforts on opposition day motions. I have been listening to the debate this morning, and it seems that in a lot of ways we are talking past each other. The substance of the motion is that:

...the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government's Investing in Canada Plan, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises; and that the Auditor General of Canada report his findings to the House no later than one year following the adoption of this motion.

I have no issue with the substance of this motion. I have not heard any speaker this morning have any issue with the actual substance of the motion, which is for the independent Auditor General to look into infrastructure spending and issue a report to the House. That should be the goal of the motion.

However, there is a preamble that is not part of the motion but is included with it. The preamble is:

That, given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that "Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan" and that the "PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist", the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to....

That is not part of the substance of the motion, and in fact those selective quotes from the March report are belied by what happened afterward. In light of those comments, Infrastructure Canada and other federal departments worked with the PBO staff to provide updated data and results, and an updated report was issued in August of 2018.

The revised report found that the Government of Canada was delivering on its commitments to make historic investments of more than \$180 billion in public infrastructure over 12 years to grow the economy and create jobs for Canadians. It also said that the government identified the vast majority, 95% of its infrastructure investments, and found that the infrastructure spending "raised the level of real GDP" in Canada.

We agree with the substance of the motion. Government members are simply saying that the preamble, which is not actually part of the substance of the motion, is misleading, and we have asked that the preamble be removed.

It would seem to me that in a minority Parliament where we are all trying to co-operate, in the same way that the government should make efforts to co-operate with the opposition, the opposition should say, when we all agree with the substance of the motion, "Okay, the preamble is no big deal. We believe this; you believe that. Let us get to the substance of the motion."

I again call on my Conservative colleagues and my other colleagues in the House to revisit the amendment that our parliamentary secretary for infrastructure proposed earlier today so that we can unanimously agree on the substance of the motion, which I think we all agree to. I hope my colleagues will consider that. I know they are all reasonable people. I hope they will think about it, talk among themselves and come back.

I am pleased, though, to talk a little bit about the infrastructure investments that we are making as Canadians and as a government. We understand the need to take action to protect our environment and build sustainable communities that provide all Canadians with a good quality of life, good jobs and, most important of all, a bright future for our kids. Infrastructure is key to this, because it can help us plan for the future. That is why we introduced the historic long-term investing in Canada plan.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Our plan is based on three key objectives: creating long-term economic growth, supporting a low-carbon green economy, and building inclusive communities. To do this, we committed to invest in five main infrastructure priorities: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation infrastructure, and rural and northern communities infrastructure.

[*English*]

Today I would like to focus on how the government's investments in public transit infrastructure and green infrastructure are benefiting Canadians in their communities from coast to coast to coast.

As I mentioned, our government has made supporting a low-carbon green economy, building inclusive communities and protecting the environment top priorities. Investing in clean, resilient infrastructure that helps reduce emissions, helps move to a net-zero carbon economy and protects people from the impacts of climate change is the right thing to do. It also happens to make financial sense. It is a win-win-win.

That is why we are working together with provinces, territories and municipalities to encourage innovation transportation projects that will create low-carbon communities and position Canada as a leader in clean technology. It is clear that switching to zero-emission public transit options helps reduce greenhouse gases and emissions. That is why Infrastructure Canada is providing \$25.3 billion in federal funding to provinces and territories for their public transit projects through the Investing in Canada infrastructure program. That is also why we have committed to invest in 5,000 zero-emission buses. Beginning in 2023, we will be directing all new federal public transit funding to zero-emission options.

While we work with our partners towards that goal, we are continuing to deliver results under our funding programs. To date we have helped purchase more than 3,800 new buses and refurbish approximately 4,900 others. We have funded improvements or construction of nearly 15,000 bus stops and shelters, which are better protecting commuters from the elements. We have helped make over 580 transit stations more accessible so that people can make their connections in good time and we have rolled out more energy-efficient buses and invested in light rail projects to reduce carbon emissions. That includes the City of Guelph's green public transit projects that my colleague talked about earlier. These projects will replace 35 diesel buses with long-range electric battery buses as well as install on-route charging stations. The funding will also help to purchase an additional 30 electric buses and build a new bus storage facility fitted with electric charging stations.

It includes \$12.6 million for Victoria, B.C.'s, new handyDART operations and maintenance facility. The handyDART bus service provides accessible, door-to-door shared transit for riders with reduced mobility, handling more than 390,000 trips annually through greater Victoria. Not only will this facility accommodate double the current fleet size, but it is also the first LEED gold standard B.C. transit facility in B.C., meeting a standard that recognizes best management practices to reduce waste of all kinds.

• (1345)

[Translation]

Investments through the Canada Infrastructure Bank in new projects in Montreal, such as the Réseau express métropolitain, or REM, and the Contrecoeur port, will increase productivity, reduce pollution, transportation and commute times, and, ultimately, get people and goods to where they need to go faster.

[English]

These investments in sustainable transportation are all making positive changes that will strengthen our communities, support economic growth and build a greener future.

We also know that investing in resilient infrastructure that can protect against or withstand climate impacts is critical to helping communities get back on their feet and back to business faster after an extreme weather or disaster event. It is also basic yet effective asset management. The costs of climate change impacts are significant and increasing. Property and casualty insurance losses in Canada averaged \$405 million per year between 1983 and 2008, but jumped to \$1.8 billion between 2009 and 2017.

[Translation]

That is why, through the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, we are investing in projects like the flood protection project in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Once complete, this project will help protect over 27,500 residents within a 12-square-kilometre area. The city says it will reduce the number of people directly affected by future flooding by 83%. It is also expected to provide long-term savings in recovery and replacement costs.

[English]

As we have seen here at home and around the world, we need to tackle these climate change events more efficiently and more effec-

tively. We know that building resilient infrastructure is less costly than repairing it after a disaster.

We know that infrastructure is important to all of us, to all of our communities, to all of our ridings across the country, and we know that we can do it in a way that respects taxpayers' dollars and protects and enhances our natural environment for generations to come.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to what my colleague said about collaboration among the various parties regarding the amendment proposed by the Liberals this morning. I would like to explain. We cannot remove the very specific terms used in the current motion because they refer to a very specific incident.

In March 2018, the Parliamentary Budget Officer was unable to get an answer to his questions. He was unable to account for \$7 billion in infrastructure spending or investments. Five months later, the government found \$7 billion to spend on infrastructure. That is a major problem when it comes to the management of public funds. That is precisely why we are asking the Auditor General to start his research in March 2018 so that we can find out what happened at that time.

It is not true that, by changing ministers, the government was able to distribute \$7 billion like that in just five months, especially since that money was certainly not spent, invested or sent to the communities during that period.

I want to ask my colleague whether he recognizes the relevance and validity of the motion. Will he vote in favour of it as it is currently worded?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Speaker, I agree with the substance of the motion, as I said.

What I object to is the misleading language in the preamble that selectively quotes one or two sentences from the entire report. However, in August 2018, the Auditor General released a revised report with contradictory information.

As I said to my colleague and to everyone else, we agree with the substance, but the preamble should be amended, as it has nothing to do with the substance, so that everyone can support it. Then we would all be able to vote in favour of the motion. It is that simple.

*Business of Supply*

• (1350)

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I am interested to know more about the amendment that is proposed to today's opposition day motion. I have not stated on the record that I plan to vote for the opposition day motion. I am curious to know what the amendment might bring to it. I would appreciate it if the parliamentary secretary would take the opportunity to explain it further.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Speaker, what I said is that the substance of the motion is that the House call on the Auditor General to do something. That is what the motion is asking for. We all agree to do that. What we object to is misleading language in the preamble that selectively quotes from one report of the Auditor General and does not recognize that a second report was issued with contradictory information.

If we really want to all agree to the substance of the motion, we can by a simple amendment to remove the objectionable words in the preamble. Then we would get a motion that everybody agrees to. That is the substance of what is trying to be achieved. Why would we not all agree to that?

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I have to ask again, is the parliamentary secretary really going to make the preamble the issue of contention? To me, it makes no sense to do that about a simple preamble.

I would like to hear the member explain rationally why, if the motion itself is something he agrees with, he is getting hung up on the preamble.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Speaker, one thing that has frustrated me over my last four years in Parliament has been when a motion has been put forward that has been deliberately designed to have one of the parties vote against it, because the party cannot agree with something that is totally outside the substance of the motion.

We all agree on the substance of the motion, but the motion asks members on the government side to agree with a negative statement about the government, which is contradicted by positive statements in a subsequent report. If we all agree with the substance in either direction, and I will invite the member to point to me when that happens in the reverse, we should get rid of the preamble which means nothing to the substance of the motion and just deal with the substance of the motion.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to this motion, but before I do that, I would ask for your indulgence to mention the passing of an individual in my riding, Jack Armstrong, who passed away last week. Jack was an extremely dedicated individual who cared so much about politics, but was rarely partisan. He spent a lot of time volunteering on campaigns, but would just as likely volunteer on a Conservative campaign as he did for my Liberal campaigns on a number of occasions. Jack will truly be missed, as will everything he offered to my community. Indeed, I miss him a lot having had the opportunity to work so closely with him.

As we talk about this motion today, I will take the opportunity to pick up from where the parliamentary secretary left off. I appreciate his sharing his time with me. What we are seeing today with this opposition motion is a new approach from the opposition, and I really do respect and appreciate it.

We used to see motions that were drafted in such a way that we never even thought would pass. They usually started off with statements about the government being so horrible and the Prime Minister did this and that. That is the way opposition motions used to be presented over the last four years, but now we are seeing a new approach. Perhaps it is the minority government that is creating this sense of desire to be so diligent in how the Conservatives bring forward motions. Now we are seeing motions that actually contain substance because there is an opportunity that motions might actually pass. It is great that the opposition is now taking this new approach. Now we have the opportunity to debate substantive opposition motions. That is great.

To that end, I believe the objectives of this motion are perfectly in line with what is necessary for accountability and transparency. We need to have the kinds of reviews that the Auditor General is being asked to do in this particular motion because this is what gives Canadians the information they need to reflect on how the government is doing.

The problem that comes up, which the parliamentary secretary who spoke before me laid out very well, is when there is information put into the preamble that is, in my opinion, purposely inserted in the motion to create a scenario where the government or the governing party, in this case the Liberal Party, will not support it. The opposition is cherry-picking quotes from a report in March, which was subsequently updated and new information was provided. The report was updated to suggest that the requirements of the government were being met. Why would Conservatives even bother including a quote when they had an opportunity to quote a new report that came out later? I can only come to the conclusion that it was done intentionally to prevent a scenario where the government could vote in favour of the motion.

As a matter of fact, the Conservative member who asked the last question, and I apologize for forgetting his riding, specifically asked why the government is getting caught up in the preamble and who cares about the preamble. I could not agree more with him. As a former mayor, and I know the member for Mount Royal was as well, I can say that nobody cares about the preamble. The city clerk usually just takes everything after "Therefore, be it resolved" because that is the action item in it. That is what actually matters.

The Conservative member asked why the government is getting caught up in the preamble. That is an excellent question. Maybe he missed it earlier when we put forward an amendment to remove that part. If it had been removed, which would have been so easy to do, we would end up with a motion that everybody could support. It is not the direction, in particular everything that follows the word "That" in this motion, that we have a problem with; it is the fact that the preamble sets up a misleading scenario to suggest that after the Auditor General or the Parliamentary Budget Officer made the report in March, that was the end of it, that it ended there. However, that is not the case. More followed.

• (1355)

In August, an additional report was tabled that said something quite different. At that time, the Parliamentary Budget Officer conducted an independent economic analysis and concluded that the federal investments made under phase one helped grow the economy and create jobs over the first two years.

Cherry-picking this information is to the benefit of nobody really because it does not matter. What is important is that we make sure we can look beyond this unnecessary information and unnecessary cherry-picking. The opposition cherry-picked at the beginning of that motion and I am clearly doing it now with another part of that. It does not matter, so why are we getting all caught up in this?

As we talk about infrastructure projects, I am thrilled to talk about the amount that is actually being invested throughout Canada. This fund sets aside \$180 billion over a 12-year period. As we know right now, there are at least 52,000 projects that have started or are under way.

Madam Speaker, I know you will be cutting me off here. I look forward to continuing after question period.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. member will have three minutes and 40 seconds to complete his speech.

We will now go to Statements by Members and the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### JIM SMITH

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, today I rise in honour of the late Dr. Jim Smith, a beloved and accomplished family doctor, a former Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly and cabinet minister for the Province of Nova Scotia, a husband, brother, father and friend.

For over 30 years, Dr. Smith was a cherished family doctor to many in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

For around two decades, Dr. Jim Smith served as the MLA for Dartmouth East. His non-partisan nature, strong work ethic and compassion for others defined his political career and his life. When Dr. Jim Smith spoke, everyone listened, and it was not just because of his hilarious, sharp wit. His constituents knew they were well represented and his political opponents knew it too.

I ask all members of the House to rise and join folks from across my province in remembering and honouring Nova Scotia's faithful servant, Dr. Jim Smith.

\* \* \*

• (1400)

### GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

**Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise once again and represent the great communi-

### Statements by Members

ties of Bradford, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King and the Chippewas of Georgina Island as the member of Parliament for York—Simcoe.

My constituents have sent me to Ottawa with one clear message: the federal government is not working for them.

Rural communities are being left behind. They have limited or non-existent broadband Internet. They are faced with outrageous costs just to heat their homes.

Small businesses are struggling. There is no affordable housing to be found. Environmental projects like the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund remain unfunded.

The government's out-of-control spending has led to billions of dollars in deficits, but communities like mine have nothing to show for it.

Under the Liberals, Canada is borrowing just to keep the lights on. Clearly, vital projects like roads and hospitals are just not being built.

People are tired of politicians who keep kicking the can down the road. I will stand up to the Liberal government and fight for my community and the people who call it home.

\* \* \*

### HUMAN RIGHTS

**Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Humber River—Black Creek, a community with a large Vietnamese population, I rise today to bring attention to the detainment of Mr. Chau Van Kham, an Australian citizen and a retiree detained by Vietnamese authorities.

Mr. Chau is a member of the Viet Tan organization, a group recognized by the United Nations as a peaceful group advocating for democratic reform.

In January, Chau was in Saigon conducting research on human rights violations when he was detained. On November 11, 2019, Chau was sentenced to 12 years in prison for what authorities described as “attempts to overthrow the state”.

As he is 70 years old, many are concerned about Mr. Chau's health, which has already declined since his arrest.

As a long-standing advocate for human rights, I want to call attention to the abuses and violations occurring against Mr. Chau Van Kham and denounce the actions of Vietnamese authorities against him, and to further support the Viet Tan organization's request for his immediate release.

*Statements by Members*

[Translation]

**FERNAND DAOUST**

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to acknowledge the passing of one of Quebec's great union leaders, Fernand Daoust, who died last Thursday at the age of 93.

He dedicated 40 years of his life to fighting for workers as a member of the FTQ. As a staunch fighter for a modern Quebec, this great union leader made a major contribution to his province's social and economic development.

An ardent defender of Quebec's interests, he was named patriot of the year in 1998, made a knight of the Ordre national du Québec in 2001 and honoured by the Ordre des francophones d'Amérique in 1994. Throughout his lifetime and in everything he did, he was a passionate advocate of the French language and a champion of French in the workplace.

We extend our sincere condolences to his family, friends and loved ones, and we mourn with the extended FTQ family.

\* \* \*

[English]

**HOCKEY**

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, sport has an incredible ability to bring us together, whether locally in our communities or as a nation watching our athletes represent Canada on the world stage.

This past holiday season was no exception to that rule, as we watched our top hockey athletes compete in three different international tournaments.

Hockey Canada sent teams to the World Junior Hockey Championship in Czech Republic, the Spengler Cup in Switzerland and the World Women's Under Eighteen Championships in Slovakia.

In all three tournaments, Canada made the final and earned a gold medal at the World Junior Championship and Spengler Cup, while garnering a hard-fought silver medal at the Women's Under Eighteen Championships.

I would like to highlight three Nova Scotians who played key roles as part of the Canadian contingent. Jared McIsaac of Truro won gold with the world junior team, while Antigonish native Alex Grant and Judique's Andrew MacDonald helped Canada to gold at the historic Spengler Cup.

I ask all members of the House join me in congratulating our athletes, who represented Canada so well on the international stage.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**DONWOOD MANOR PERSONAL CARE HOME**

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to deliver my first member's statement, and I am pleased to take this opportunity to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of Donwood Manor Personal Care Home, an important institu-

tion serving seniors in the North Kildonan neighbourhood of my riding.

Donwood first opened its doors in 1970 and was founded by members of eight Mennonite Brethren churches in Winnipeg. The founders recognized the need in the community for subsidized, quality Christian care of seniors and came together to create this incredible organization.

Each time I visit Donwood, I am in awe of the compassion and grace in the quality of care Donwood provides to seniors. It is a place that enables the elderly to transition from their homes to a caring community and to age with dignity and grace.

I would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of Nina Labun, CEO of Donwood Manor; board chair John Janzen; Brian Loewen, chair of the Donwood Manor Foundation, and the dedicated staff and volunteers.

I congratulate Donwood Manor. It is my honour to formally recognize Donwood in the House of Commons today.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**WORKSHOP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN**

**Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in my hometown of Rogersville, we have a program called "Femmes Fortes".

Two years ago, a comment made by a recently widowed woman really bothered a municipal employee. She had mentioned that since her husband's passing, she felt powerless and useless, and she realized how much she had depended on her husband to take on traditionally male tasks, such as car repairs, carpentry and the like.

That employee, Angèle McCaie, then proposed her "Femmes Fortes" project to the municipal council. In response to suggestions made during a meeting, more than 30 workshops were organized, including workshops on self-defence, woodworking, car repairs, menopause, anxiety, physical fitness and gardening.

Mr. Speaker, just know that if you ever drop by my community of Rogersville, you are sure to meet some "Femmes Fortes", some strong women.

\* \* \*

[English]

**TEACHERS' STRIKES IN ONTARIO**

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on an issue that is of top importance to Davenport residents, and that is education.

Over the last couple of months there have been rotating strikes in Ontario, and this labour dispute is having a negative impact on our children and their education.

Education contracts expired in August 2019, and teachers' unions have not been able to reach an agreement with the Ontario government over their wages and the future of education in our province. Teachers have legitimate concerns about the future of education in terms of class size, online courses and proposed cuts within the system.

Parents are equally concerned about the impact of the strike on their kids, including missed learning days, in addition to the future of education in the province.

I want to encourage the Ontario government and the minister of education to immediately return to the bargaining table to address these issues and to bargain in good faith.

The future of all Ontario students and their education depends on it.

\* \* \*

#### NEIL PEART

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Neil Peart died a few short weeks ago, but he left a legacy of music on a nation and world of fans who revel in the challenge of air drumming to the best of Rush.

For 40 years, Neil Peart had us lost in the lyrics that would bring images of the *Limelight*, being caught up in the *Spirit of Radio* and the life and conflict of the *Subdivisions*.

Peart's lyrical adventure led us away from his world-renowned drum kit to motoring on highways and back roads. He rode his motorbike as a healing highway for his loss and pain, which he wrote about, taking us along for the ride.

Neil Peart's legacy is more than one of books, albums or hundreds of performances. Though he lived a private life, he shared his heartache and exhilarated us with his performances.

With every beat of his drum, with every lyric he wrote and with every story he told, Neil Peart will forever and always be *Closer to the Heart* of Canadians. May he rest in peace and may God bless his family and friends.

\* \* \*

#### FIREARMS

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite being a veteran infantry officer fully trained on a number of prohibited and restricted firearms, I am required by law to complete both the Canadian firearms safety course and the Canadian restricted firearms safety course should I want to own a restricted firearm. I successfully completed both courses over the last few weeks.

These courses are integral to knowing about firearms safety and to ensuring Canadians safely store and use firearms. They would also be incredibly valuable to any member in the House drafting firearms legislation. I trust that all members working on this legis-

#### Statements by Members

lation have taken or will take these courses, including the Minister of Public Safety.

In my home riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, hunting, farming and sport shooting are a way of life. I have been hearing from many of my constituents that they are deeply concerned about the proposed Liberal firearms legislation, via an order in council, without any debate in the House. Forcing law-abiding Canadians to follow even more laws will not reduce urban gun crime and fails to address the real problems of gangs, illegal smuggling, drugs and poverty.

As a newly elected MP, I am here to solve problems, not create new ones.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are currently celebrating the lunar new year, a celebration of family and togetherness, marking good fortune during this Year of the Rat. I extend these wishes of health and prosperity to all.

However, during this time, we must also take a moment to remember and honour the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

In 2014, I visited the place of unimaginable suffering, and I am still affected by this experience. I mourn the victims of this tragedy and I encourage Canadians to be conscious of other human rights abuses taking place globally.

In Canada, we are safe, free to celebrate the diversity of our cultures and our faiths and appreciate our differences. Many abroad are unable to do so, and it is our duty to serve as the global example of multiculturalism.

In this time of celebration and remembrance, I encourage others to be conscious of such simple freedoms as well.

\* \* \*

#### CHILD CARE

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I still remember the desperation I felt when I could not get my little guy into a quality affordable licensed child care space. It is no joke. The wait lists were so long that I was not offered space until he was eight, yet this is the reality for so many working families.

We know investing in child care is good for the child, for the family and for our economy. Every dollar invested in child care is returned threefold in the economy.

### Oral Questions

For decades, the Liberals have made endless promises on child care programs, yet we have seen little real action, let alone a quality, universal, affordable, accessible system. In this new minority Parliament, words are not good enough.

Budget 2020 needs to have a significant increase in investments to at least \$1 billion annually so that families with children under five and elementary school-age children who need before- and after-school care can access them.

Federal investments can build on what the B.C. government has done, based on the \$10 a day model, saving families upwards of \$1,000 a month. No more pretty words; it is time for action.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### ROGER NICOLET

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to honour the memory of Roger Nicolet, a leading engineer and well-known face in Quebec public life. He was responsible for unforgettable projects like the Louvre pyramid, the CN Tower and the Olympic Village in Montreal. He served tirelessly as mayor of Austin for 33 years, as reeve of an RCM and as president of the F d ration qu b coise des municipalit s.

We will also remember how committed he was to Quebec, in particular as a member of the historic B langer-Campeau Commission on the future of our nation. He presided over commissions on significant matters of public safety in Quebec, such as the ice storm and the Saguenay floods. He received a number of honours for his commitment, most notably being named an officer of the Ordre national du Qu bec.

On behalf of the Bloc Qu b cois, I want to offer my condolences to Roger Nicolet's family and loved ones. He was a talented, generous man and we recognize his legacy.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this fall's harvest has been extremely difficult for Canadian farmers, and the Liberals have made it worse. Liberal political blunders have cost Canadian farmers vital trade markets, and they added to that burden by implementing a devastating carbon tax.

This fall, farmers had to dry their grain and the carbon tax cost them billions of dollars, money they do not have, yet the agriculture minister still says she does not know how the carbon tax will impact farmers.

Through an Order Paper question, I asked the minister about an exemption for Canadian farmers from the carbon tax. In her response, she admitted she and her department, do "not have information concerning the administration of the federal carbon tax." How can the Liberals implement a crippling carbon tax on Canadian agriculture without having any clue how it will impact hard-working farm families?

The Liberals must stop ignoring the data, give Canadian farmers credit for their conservation efforts and immediately exempt Canadian agriculture from the Liberals' crippling carbon tax.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

#### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am thrilled to rise for the first time in the 43rd Parliament to thank the wonderful people of Saint John—Rothesay and my incredible campaign volunteers for giving me a second mandate to stand up for them in this place.

Since being re-elected, I have hit the ground running. I have worked to deliver nearly \$8 million in new federal funding for our riding. Last week, this began paying off.

I was thrilled to announce our federal government's investment of \$750,000 through ACOA to help UNB Saint John relocate its MBA program to Saint John's uptown core. This significant federal investment in our riding will allow our community to fully leverage its entrepreneurial hub and its world-class university in order to unlock its full economic potential.

This is only the beginning. I am excited to continue delivering the unprecedented federal investments our riding needs by always putting it first in Ottawa.

**The Speaker:** Before going to Oral Questions, I just want to remind hon. members that the S.O. 31s are limited to 60 seconds. I noticed a few of them going five seconds over and as much as eight seconds over. I just want to remind everyone to keep it within the 60 seconds. I would not want to cut anybody off.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

#### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under the current Prime Minister we have the worst of both worlds. We have the sky-high deficits that he promised, but we do not have the infrastructure spending that was supposed to go along with it.

In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that the infrastructure plan does not exist. Instead of spending their hard-earned money on things that will actually grow the economy, all Canadians have instead is reckless borrowing, wasteful spending and sky-high taxes to pay for it all.

If the Prime Minister is so sure about his infrastructure plan, will he support our calls to call in the Auditor General?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, five years ago we made a commitment to Canadians to do things differently from the Conservatives who had underinvested in infrastructure for 10 years. We made historic investments in infrastructure to grow the economy and to improve Canadians' quality of life, while Conservatives campaigned on billions of dollars' worth of cuts from much-needed infrastructure across the country.

Our plan has over 4,800 projects under way or completed, four times the number of the Conservatives in their last four-year mandate. We are building affordable housing, community centres, libraries and bridges. We are investing in Canada's future.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is doing something different from the previous Conservative government. We got projects built, we balanced the budget and we cut taxes for Canadians all along the way.

Instead, for every \$100 that the current Liberal government is spending on infrastructure, only three dollars is actually going to projects for trade and transportation, all the while racking up billions of dollars in new debt. In fact, this year alone \$25 billion of taxpayers' money will have to go just to pay the interest on that debt.

Once again, will the Prime Minister support our calls to bring in the Auditor General?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, many Canadians remember with regret the Conservative Party's infrastructure plan that features things like billboards, doorknobs and, yes, gazebos. We will continue to invest in the things that Canadians need with a historic \$40-billion national housing strategy, investing in transit, investing in the kinds of things that keep our economy moving and keep Canadians growing toward a better future.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, match our record of opening up ports and bridges and increasing trade capacity against the current Prime Minister's temporary hockey rinks and spending money on the Asian infrastructure bank, building projects in other countries.

• (1420)

[Translation]

The Prime Minister promised that his infrastructure plan would increase the GDP, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer showed that the plan would not have any impact on the GDP.

Will the Prime Minister support our motion so that the Auditor General can look into his infrastructure program?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we made a very different choice from the Conservatives. We chose to invest in communities and in the infrastructure that has an impact on people's lives rather than opting for the kinds of cuts and austerity measures that the Conservatives keep advocating for even after two electoral defeats.

We know that investing in communities puts more money in the pockets of Canadians. That is how we created over one million jobs

and lifted nearly one million people out of poverty. We will continue to make investments.

### Oral Questions

\* \* \*

[English]

### HEALTH

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the crisis created by the coronavirus has made it clearer than ever that co-operation among all governments around the globe is important to ensuring public health.

Will the Prime Minister support observer status in the World Health Organization for Taiwan?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with the WHO. We continue to work with allied countries around the world to ensure that we are dealing with this health challenge. I can reassure Canadians that the risks to Canadians are low, and in regard to Canadians in China, we are engaged in consular support for them.

We will continue to make sure that Canadians remain safe amid these concerns about public health.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that was a very simple question. There has been a request made by the government in Taiwan to be an observer at the WHO, especially during this time. This is a decision that the Prime Minister can make, whether or not to support Taiwan's request.

It is a yes-or-no question. Will the Prime Minister support observer status for Taiwan at the WHO?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are a country that is always engaged in supporting multilateralism, whether supporting the United Nations, whether supporting the WHO or supporting collaboration between countries around the world. We will continue to work together on addressing this public health emergency.

We recognize that the Conservatives like to play politics with international affairs. We are focused on keeping Canadians safe.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, aluminum is Quebec's second-biggest export and accounts for no fewer than 30,000 jobs in Quebec. Aluminum can enter North America freely through Mexico without protection. I would imagine the government has studied the impact of the latest version of the free trade agreement on Quebec's aluminum sector.

Can the government and the Prime Minister confirm that such studies exist and make them public?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. Under the old agreement, North American aluminum producers had no guarantee calling for the use of their products in North American auto manufacturing.

We now have a guarantee that 70% of the aluminum used in North American auto manufacturing must come from North America. Given that much of North America's aluminum is produced in Quebec, that is good news for aluminum producers and workers in Quebec and across Canada.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we must not confuse parts and the metal used to manufacture them. When NAFTA was signed, Quebec produced more aluminum than China. Now China produces 15 times more aluminum than Quebec. There were five projects to modernize or expand aluminum smelters in Quebec.

Can the Prime Minister definitively confirm that there will be no negative impact and that those five expansion and modernization projects of aluminum smelters in Quebec will go ahead?

• (1425)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of innovation in Quebec's aluminum sector. I have watched projects like AP60 and Elysis take shape.

We know that there is good news for our aluminum workers and manufacturers. We will always support them, just as we supported them by eliminating the unfair tariffs the Americans had imposed on the aluminum sector.

The member does not need to take my word for it. He can trust Jean Simard, president of the Aluminium Association of Canada, who said that the new NAFTA is the right way to go.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2016, we learned that Volkswagen vehicles were emitting illegal levels of toxins that were hurting people and the environment, yet the Liberal government did nothing for three years. When it finally decided to act, it gave a foreign company, which makes no contribution to our Canadian workforce, a sweetheart deal and let it off the hook with no criminal charges.

[Translation]

Volkswagen knew that its cars did not meet our health and environmental standards.

Why do the Liberals choose foreign companies over people and the environment?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we take our responsibility to never stop fighting for a healthier environment very seriously. That is why we are pleased that Volkswagen paid the price for the way it misled Canadians. It is important to ensure that in Canada we have some of the best standards and the best plan in the world to fight climate change.

We will continue to lead the charge because we know that jobs, our children's future and the future of the planet are at stake.

\* \* \*

**PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is a foreign company and no criminal charges were laid. That is unacceptable.

Yesterday, the minister bragged about the fact that the government uses outside help for our public services. Giving \$12 billion to foreign companies is not a solution.

[English]

The Liberal government has contributed to the tripling of the outsourcing of public service work. That is tripling the public money that goes to large international corporations.

Outsourcing hurts our Canadian workforce, so why is the Liberal government favouring large international corporations over Canadian workers?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been focused over the past five years on growing the Canadian economy by creating new jobs and by encouraging Canadians to create new jobs. We have seen success with over a million new jobs created over the past five years and the lowest poverty rates in a long time. We have decreased poverty by significant percentages and lifted almost a million people out of poverty.

We recognize that when it comes to procurement there is always an important balance to be made between making sure we are making responsible use of taxpayer money while at the same time creating good jobs. We are always focused on getting that balance right.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in July the expert, science-based review said that Teck's Frontier mine should be approved. All local indigenous communities support it. Yesterday the environment minister said the Liberals might reject it. Today he said they might delay it. Death by delay is a tactic of anti-energy activists.

If approved, Frontier would immediately create 7,000 much-needed jobs in Alberta and show the world that Canada is open for business. Can the Prime Minister name a single project outside of the oil and gas sector that his cabinet has rejected based on emissions?

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians elected this government to protect the environment, to grow the economy, to advance reconciliation and to create good jobs. They also expect this government to oversee fair and thorough environmental assessment processes.

This is a major project that is being reviewed under the 2012 environmental assessment process. Under that process, the cabinet must make a decision by the end of February, and we will do so.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the answer to my question is no. In fact, the Liberals have turned a blind eye to major emissions from projects in other sectors, and even to other projects in the oil and gas sector, to foreign oil and to pipelines in China.

The Prime Minister said that he heard the message from Albertans. Premier Kenney made it easy with a five-point list, including the quick approval of Teck's Frontier mine. Oil sands are a world leader in emissions reductions and they create jobs in every single province. Alberta needs them now. Will the Prime Minister approve Teck's Frontier mine?

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas sector, like many other sectors, is very important to the Canadian economy. However, Canadians expect that when we are reviewing major projects of any type, we look at the environmental impacts in an environmental assessment process. That is what we are doing. We are following the process that was actually put in place by the previous government in 2012. We will review the project and we will be making a decision by the end of February.

\* \* \*

● (1430)

### CONSULAR AFFAIRS

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday Reg and Sherry Renner from Langley reached out for help. Their daughter Lauren, her husband and two-year-old child live and work in Wuhan, which is currently on lockdown. Lauren is eight months pregnant. Due to the ban on all public and private traffic in the city, she is unable to travel freely to the hospital should she go into labour. Being a grandmother myself, I understand the real urgency of the situation. What is the government's plan to ensure the safety of Lauren and her unborn child?

### Oral Questions

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this matter to our attention. We take the safety and security of every Canadian abroad very seriously. Canadian officials in Ottawa and in China are working closely with their Chinese counterparts to address the situation in the affected area in light of the recent events.

Canada continues to liaise closely with our international partners to develop options. At four o'clock we will hold a press conference where we will explain to Canadians what measures we will be taking to care for and offer consular services to Canadians in China.

\* \* \*

### HEALTH

**Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is no excuse for the Liberals to not share that information right here in the House. We should not have to wait outside for the press conference to hear that information.

Just today we have heard that the health minister told Canadians that the first individual identified with the coronavirus did not self-identify when entering Canada. On Monday we learned that the individual did tell the CBSA officer he had been to Wuhan and did have a cough. There is no question that this raises concern between CBSA and health officials when China has seen a 65% increase in reported cases in just one day. How can Canadians be sure that the current screening measures are working?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the individual the member opposite is referring to took exactly the appropriate precautions that he was given at the border. For example, he returned to his home. When he began to exhibit symptoms, he phoned for emergency help and let the emergency responders know that he had recently travelled to Wuhan. They arrived in protective gear and alerted the hospital to which he was being transported. The appropriate infection protections were taken and he was isolated.

This gives me confidence that the systems are working very well together.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus crisis is worsening. Several people are currently under observation. We also know that the virus is spreading more quickly than we thought and that the number of infected people has risen by 65%. We also know that the first two cases detected in Canada were on flight CZ311, which had more than one hundred passengers.

Does the government know the location of all passengers who were on that flight?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, because of the collaboration I mentioned earlier, my colleagues in Ontario and all across the provinces have been working extremely well to share information.

In the case the member references, we immediately provided the airplane manifest, which allowed the contact tracing to begin. In fact, Ontario has been contacting the passengers who may have been infected and has done so exceedingly well.

I have every confidence that my colleagues across the provinces and territories are taking their responsibilities as seriously as we are, and I want to thank them for doing so.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***CONSULAR AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, more than 168 Canadians are currently confined in quarantined areas in China. The United States, France, South Korea, Germany and Morocco have already confirmed that they would be bringing home their citizens.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what concrete action he has taken to protect our Canadians in China and to provide the appropriate consular services?

**Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Clearly, our priority is the health and safety of Canadians around the world. I can tell my colleague that, as of yesterday and according to the most recent data obtained, 250 Canadians are registered in that region, which enables us to provide them with the most up-to-date information. Furthermore, 126 Canadians have requested consular services. We are looking at the options together with our allies. We will provide all the consular assistance that Canadians may need in China.

\* \* \*

● (1435)

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, how can any of the regions of Quebec have faith in a government that is prepared to abandon Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Côte-Nord?

Everyone around the Prime Minister was nodding when he said that the industry was happy. Sure, since he has suggested that the industry outsource operations and rely on coal and lower salaries to produce the aluminum currently made in Quebec.

The minister sent a letter saying that the government was prepared to co-operate. Yesterday I told her that we had a suggestion and asked if the government would be open to it. She rose to talk about the Premier of Quebec and who knows what.

I repeat: If we put forward a suggestion, will the government be open to it?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am certainly always willing to listen to all members of the House.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, aluminum is crucial to our regions and to Quebec. I am talking about Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Deschambault in Quebec's national capital region, Bécancour in central Quebec, and the North Shore, home to Alcoa and Alouette, the largest aluminum smelter not just in Canada but in North America. The aluminum sector is hugely important, but it is in jeopardy because of an agreement the Bloc Québécois is being asked to endorse without comment.

Considering what this means for the aluminum sector and the damage it will do to supply management, does the government understand the price it is making Quebec regions pay?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the new NAFTA will benefit Quebec in big ways. It maintains \$57.3 billion worth of exports from Quebec to the United States. It maintains the cultural exemption, which is very important to our government, and it maintains supply management even though the United States wanted to completely dismantle it. This is a good agreement for Quebec and for Canada.

\* \* \*

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know that in 2017 a number of board members sent a letter to the Prime Minister to warn him of the potential ramifications of changes to the process for appointing Parole Board members. They never got a reply. Experienced board members did not have their terms renewed, and instead they were replaced by new members with very little experience.

Why did no one follow up on that important letter?

*[English]*

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we worked very hard to implement a merit-based system for the appointment of people to these important board positions. Upon appointment, all board members complete an intensive five-week board member orientation session, wherein they receive training on relevant law, policy and risk assessment. This is followed up by ongoing mentoring and coaching by the regional vice-chair. No board members are assigned any decision-making responsibilities until they have fully completed their training and have the confidence of the regional vice-chair.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know that this is a sensitive case, but it is also a very serious situation and we want answers. The minister said yesterday that there would be an internal investigation, but that is not enough. Considering the current situation, other criminals could be on release with the same conditions. This is about women's safety. At present, bureaucrats are investigating bureaucrats, and that is clearly inadequate.

Will the government allow an external investigation?

*[English]*

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again I take the opportunity to express our collective condolences and sympathy to the families and friends of the deceased in this tragic case. In parole decisions, public safety is and always will be our main consideration. The Parole Board makes these decisions based on long-standing criteria established to promote safe and effective reintegration into society of all offenders. In this case, we share the concerns of Canadians, and we have asked the chair of the Parole Board and the commissioner of the Correctional Service to conduct a thorough investigation and review so that we can make decisions based on facts. That is what we will do.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River raised concerns from his constituents on the proposed Liberal gun ban. These concerns include the following: so-called military-style assault rifles are already banned and have been for decades; the policy focuses on the style and not the function of firearms, and law-abiding hunters and sport shooters fear losing their guns arbitrarily; this program will be costly and have no impact on crime; and the entire process bypasses debate and democracy.

Will the minister listen to Canadians and the evidence and cancel this misguided policy?

• (1440)

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have listened very clearly to Canadians. We are going to eliminate from our society the presence of weapons that were designed to kill people. However, that is not all we are going to do. We are going to strengthen the law with respect to securing our borders. We are going to strengthen our laws to prevent the theft of handguns that get into the hands of criminals. We are going to strengthen our laws to deter criminal diversion of handguns.

We are investing in law enforcement and giving them the tools they need to keep our communities safe, and we are investing in kids and communities so that they can make better decisions.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the load we just heard. Canadians have been very clear. They want action on crime, action on gangs and action on illegal firearms, and they want it now. This was confirmed by the letter from the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River to the Minister of Public Safety, wherein his constituents objected to the misguided Liberal plan to ban firearms, which focuses on

law-abiding Canadians and not on criminals. The member urged the minister to take his constituents' advice and follow it.

Will the minister listen to constituents, to his own colleague, and stop this misguided Liberal confiscation?

**The Speaker:** I want to remind hon. members that insinuating something does not really say a word we cannot say in the House, but I remind hon. members to use some caution and judgment.

The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for decades police chiefs in this country have been asking successive governments to take firm action to remove military-style weapons from our society. We have listened.

We also heard from law enforcement that it needed investment in tools and resources in order to deal effectively with the gangs, and we have undertaken to strengthen gun control laws. We have looked at the ways in which guns get into the hands of criminals. It is across the border, through theft and through diversion. We will strengthen our laws to keep our communities safe.

**The Speaker:** I am starting to have a hard time hearing the answers again. I want to remind hon. members that when an answer is being given, or a question is being asked, to please respect the other side, whichever side it is, and listen.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

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**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my riding has the third-highest poverty rate in the country. In Canada, over one million children live in poverty. The Liberals promise one thing but do the opposite. They could end child poverty today, but they choose not to. Instead of financing their corporate buddies and letting the ultra-rich off the hook, they could invest in pharmacare, child care and a \$15 minimum wage. Campaign 2000 shows that these are the solutions.

Are the Liberals planning to act to end child poverty, yes or no?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as a government we released the first-ever national anti-poverty strategy. We introduced the Canada child benefit that is delivering more money to nine out of 10 families. We have introduced the first-ever Canada housing benefit, which will make a real difference in the lives of families and enable families to take their rental supplement and make it portable and help children along the way.

We are dedicated to also meeting our commitment to introduce an additional 250,000 before- and after-school child care spaces.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are taking from the poor and giving to the rich. They have Robin Hood backwards.

Today, the PBO released a report about the Liberals' \$6.9-billion tax plan. Guess who benefits the most? It is the wealthiest 10%. That is why we put together a better plan that also gives dental care to four and a half million Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Rather than giving billions of dollars to the wealthy, will the Liberals work with us to bring in a dental plan for those who need it?

[*English*]

**Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to look at how we can have the broadest impact on Canadians. That is why we put in place a tax plan that is going to significantly make a difference for millions of Canadians.

Yesterday in the House I said that it would help nine million. In fact, when I went back to my office, it is actually 20 million Canadians who will be paying lower taxes as a result of our tax changes and, yes, it will be means-tested so that the wealthiest will not get the tax advantage. It will help those people who are most in need of help. That is important for the future of our country.

\* \* \*

● (1445)

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador recently experienced a record-setting and unprecedented blizzard that left parts of the province covered in up to 94 centimetres of snow, thousands without power and stuck inside their homes.

Can the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the steps taken by our government to assist and support Newfoundlanders during their time of need?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we stand together in a time of need. Before, during and after the storm we were in constant contact with Premier Ball and Minister Bragg. Together, we collaborated to immediately mobilize their request for assistance.

Over 400 members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Reserves were warmly welcomed by the people of Newfoundland. They helped to clear snow and attended to the elderly and sick to ensure that those who needed help received it.

On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to commend the resilience of the people of Newfoundland, and to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of all first responders. In particular, I would like to say thanks to the Canadian Armed Forces and our reserves for answering the call to service.

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman has been cleared and it is time for the Liberals to explain why they spent 1.4 million taxpayer dollars on their malicious political prosecution of an innocent navy officer. The Liberals obstructed justice, used code words and refused to turn over evidence. The Prime Minister twice said publicly that Norman would be put on trial, even before charges were laid.

Meanwhile, our military's dangerously unreliable 75-year-old pistols need to be replaced. How many new pistols could have been bought for our troops using these unnecessary legal fees?

**Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to making sure that the Canadian Armed Forces have all the tools necessary and that our defence policy is fully funded. We are making sure that our women and men get the equipment that they need.

The government and Vice-Admiral Norman have reached a mutually acceptable agreement, the details of which remain confidential. After consulting with his family, Vice-Admiral Norman retired from the Canadian Armed Forces and I want to thank him for his long, dedicated service of 38 years.

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**REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government has failed to recognize the softwood lumber crisis in British Columbia. Over two dozen mills have closed down and forestry-dependent communities are losing their primary industries, yet western diversification, the money into British Columbia, has primarily gone to the thriving cities of Victoria and Vancouver. There have been crumbs given to the communities that need it the most.

Will the minister for Western Economic Diversification commit to supporting these desperate communities in budget 2020?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, of course, we understand that at certain times some people across the country and in B.C. feel anxiety toward economic downturns. We understand that the growth that we have seen across the country has not necessarily been equally reallocated.

Therefore, of course we want to work with Western Economic Diversification, to make sure that people in B.C. and across the west know that we have their backs. That is exactly what my team and I will be doing on this.

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#### PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government recently fired a public service employee who oversaw anti-racism initiatives for speaking out against the Prime Minister for wearing blackface. She was just doing her job.

Now we have received documents that outline “duty of loyalty” training for the Department of Canadian Heritage. While that sounds Orwellian enough, it goes on to note that “Failure to observe the duty of loyalty may justify disciplinary action, including dismissal.”

Why does the Prime Minister need our non-partisan, professional public service to profess absolute and total loyalty to him?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the most important duty that the government and parliamentarians have is to serve Canadians to the best of their ability. That is what we also expect from the public service, which is a professional service of the highest world standard. We expect from public servants the service that they need to give to Canadians with the expectations and requirements that go with that level of service.

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#### INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for all their talk about reconciliation, the Liberals are shutting first nations students in my riding out of their school. Exshaw School is home to nearly 200 first nations students. The Liberals have terminated a 47-year-old agreement and cut funding for the students. The school is left with an insurmountable \$1.6-million shortfall and will be forced to close its doors if Indigenous Services Canada continues to refuse to work towards a solution.

Typical Liberal lip service will not do. Why are they shutting the door on indigenous students and a school they have chosen to attend?

• (1450)

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, to put it clearly, no first nation child will go without funding. This is about advancing first nations control of first nations education.

Stoney Nakoda and the Stoney Education Authority expressed an interest in taking over the administration of their own funding agreement with the Canadian Rockies Public Schools division from

#### Oral Questions

my department, and we did so. Funding will continue to be provided by my department to the schools, based on actual costs of educational programming, until a new education agreement is negotiated and finalized with the first nation.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### EMPLOYMENT

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP held a press conference to talk about the labour dispute affecting Swissport maintenance workers.

This shines a spotlight on two issues related to Canadian labour laws, including the anti-scab legislation. Over 40 years after Quebec banned the use of scabs, it is high time that the federal government did the same.

Workers also need to be protected in the case of contract flipping, which is when people lose their jobs and then are hired back again but with inferior working conditions. That harkens back to another era.

Will the minister finally reform the code and move into the 21st century by banning—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Labour.

[English]

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Labour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is the first time I am rising in this session, and I would like to thank the good people of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for re-electing me and giving me the honour to serve.

[Translation]

I thank my colleague for her question. We have already begun to hold consultations.

[English]

I have spoken with the Minister of Transport. I have actually spoken with one of my opposition critics and labour leaders with respect to the issue of contract flipping or retendering. We know that this is a complex topic.

We have consulted, and I will continue to be consulting, with all those who will be impacted to find a solution that meets the needs of both employers and employees.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, community organizations and the smallest municipalities are concerned about the delays in the federal summer jobs program.

These subsidies for hiring students often make all the difference for organizations with limited means. It is also a good job opportunity for young people across Quebec. There, as elsewhere, people are worried that the delays will make them miss out on the program.

### Oral Questions

We have some simple questions. First, when will the government finally start accepting applications for funding? Second, will it push back the deadline to make up for its delays?

[English]

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we recognize how valuable the Canada summer jobs program is to employers, community organizations and, indeed, to young people across the country. We are really excited that we doubled the number of opportunities for young people three years ago and we are continuing on with that commitment.

I can assure the member opposite that we will very soon be releasing the details of the application process and look forward to 70,000 students getting benefits from it this summer.

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### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the United States is Canada's most important trading partner, with trade totalling over \$900 billion annually. On December 12, Conservatives asked the government to release all of the economic documents and analyses that show specifically how this new deal will affect our economy, but it refused. Canadians deserve to know all the upsides and downsides of this deal before we agree to sign it.

Will the government immediately provide all of the new NAFTA-related economic reviews and analyses, both informal and formal?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Global Affairs Canada's chief economist is currently preparing an analysis based on the December amendments to the deal which, in my view and in the view of our professional negotiating team, improve the deal for Canadians. We absolutely intend to publish the analysis once it is finalized, which will be soon.

I invite all of us as colleagues to put Canada and Canadians first and to ratify the new NAFTA without undue delay.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate finally receiving a briefing today from the government on the new NAFTA, 48 days after we asked questions regarding it. For a government that wants to move quickly on this file, taking a month and a half to respond simply is not good enough. We have to do our due diligence.

When will the government recognize the fact that it is a minority government and start working with us?

• (1455)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking my colleague from Prince Albert for his ongoing collaboration over many years.

We absolutely are very open to sharing and making available our officials to all members of the opposition immediately after the signing of the protocol of amendments to the new NAFTA. Steve

Verheul offered briefings in December to the leaders of all of the opposition parties with the members of their caucus they chose to invite, and I spoke last week with the member for Prince Albert.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, aluminum is one of the three economic drivers in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Some 33% of Canada's aluminum is produced there. Our region will be one of those hardest hit by CUSMA. To mitigate the impact of this imperfect agreement on our region, I reached out to the government to propose constructive, tangible solutions.

Does the government plan to work with us, the Conservatives, to move the aluminum sector forward?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said to the Bloc Québécois, we are absolutely open to constructive proposals from our colleagues on the other side of the House.

As far as the aluminum sector is concerned, I want to point out that when the new NAFTA is ratified, 70% of a vehicle's content in North America will have to be made in North America. Today, that number is 0%. I think that 70% is better than 0%.

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### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

**Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, January 22 was a historic day for all Franco-Ontarians. We learned that the proposed Ontario French-language university will be moving forward thanks to the leadership of this government, which supported the Franco-Ontarians who rallied to make their French-language university a reality at last.

Can the Minister of Official Languages tell us more?

**Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as a Franco-Ontarian, you should celebrate with me.

I thank my colleague from Ottawa South for his question.

Indeed, it is a great victory, a historic agreement. We can now celebrate the creation of the first French-language university in Ontario by and for francophones. This victory was won by the Franco-Ontarians, Acadians and Quebecers who came together to condemn the Ford government's Conservative cutbacks in late 2018.

We will always stand with francophones from across the country to defend the French fact.

[English]

### FINANCE

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, government documents show that the Liberal finance minister tried to fudge the government's balance sheet by reclassifying the \$256-million gift to the China-controlled Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank from a provisioned expense to an investment. If a private corporation did this, it would be criminal fraud.

This same bank is building three energy pipelines in Asia and is furthering China's foreign policy interests. Will the minister come clean about the other budget trickery the Liberals are now using to hide how big the deficit really is?

**Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, we have been very clear since day one, since the very first day in office, that we want to make investments in Canadians. We want to make investments in middle-class Canadians. We want to make investments in infrastructure. We know that this can advance our economy. It can also help Canadians.

With respect to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, what we have said is that we want to support multilateral development banks. We know that they help the global economy grow, and helping the global economy helps Canadian firms and Canadians to have a better future.

\* \* \*

### VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, CTV, Global News and the Toronto Star have all reported that 40,000 veterans are trapped in a benefit backlog boondoggle of the government's own making. Yesterday I asked the minister how many veterans are currently waiting longer than the 16-week standard for a decision on their benefits. He did not answer, so I will ask again. How many veterans are currently waiting longer than the 16-week standard for a decision on their benefits?

• (1500)

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, I wish my hon. colleague, when he was in government, had not fired the thousand people that we needed so badly in Veterans Affairs, but we have picked up the problem and we are going to solve the problem—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Brantford—Brant would like to hear his answer. I am sure we do not want to interrupt the hon. minister from giving him an answer.

I will let him answer.

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again I will tell my hon. colleague that yes, we understood the problem. That is why we invested \$10 billion over six years in Veterans Affairs. That is why we are revamping the system. It is so that we will be able to deal with the backlog that exists in Veterans Affairs, which is not acceptable.

### Oral Questions

It is important to note too that current applications have about doubled, and we have hired 700 new people. We will solve the problem.

\* \* \*

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Lake Simcoe is the jewel of central Ontario. It contributes to the great quality of life for those who live nearby. On October 9, 2019, the Deputy Prime Minister visited Barrie and promised that a re-elected Liberal government would reinstate funding for the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us when she will make good on her commitment and reinstate the \$40 million to the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund?

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this government has committed significant funds to the Great Lakes and other freshwater initiatives to address a number of the issues, not just the ones referred to by the hon. member. We committed during the campaign to put in place a new Canada water agency that will look to prioritize the issues that are of greatest regional significance and to focus resources on those. Stay tuned.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association with local elected officials and a number of leaders from rural communities.

I heard about the challenges they faced after 10 years of neglect by the former Conservative government. They spoke about how important it is to have a real partner in Ottawa to make life in rural communities more affordable, no matter where someone lives.

Could the Minister of Rural Economic Development tell the House how this government is making targeted investments in rural regions?

**Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government's unprecedented investments in rural regions are paying off. Since 2015, we have connected 400,000 rural households to high-speed Internet. We are investing in parks, roads and community centres across the country, which is creating jobs. All Canadians benefit when we invest in rural regions.

*Oral Questions**[English]***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it has been four years since the government was found guilty of systemic discrimination against first nation children. The Prime Minister has seven non-compliance orders, millions spent on lawyers, is going to Federal Court to try to quash the ruling, and now he has blown off tomorrow's deadline for negotiating while refusing to support the class action that he said he was going to support.

The Prime Minister has built his political reputation fighting the most vulnerable children in this country, and kids have died. When is he going to call off his lawyers, sit down with Cindy Blackstock and negotiate a just solution for all these children and their families? When is he going to do it?

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our commitment to compensate first nation children harmed by past child and family services policy is firm and remains firm.

Canada has named senior officials from my department and the Department of Justice to conduct discussions. Those discussions are ongoing and will be kept on a strictly confidential basis to build trust between the parties, which heretofore has not been the case. No party will be speaking publicly about this. Because we want to make progress specifically focused on children who have been harmed by past policies, the CHRT has asked our parties to sit down and determine what the compensation process might look like. That is exactly what we are going to do.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's correctional investigator recently said, "The indigenization of Canada's prison population is nothing short of a national travesty." I agree. The TRC and "Calls for Justice" also agree.

More action is required to address the over-incarceration of indigenous, black and other marginalized Canadians. Evidence clearly shows that mandatory minimum penalties are a big part of the problem and not smart justice policy. There has been enough study and too much delay due to political expediency. Can the government confirm that it will repeal mandatory minimum penalties for all but the most serious of crimes?

● (1505)

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to advancing sentencing reform that will stand the test of time. This means continuing to work with our provincial and territorial partners, with leaders from indigenous communities and all actors in the criminal justice system, as well as taking advice from our courts and listening to Canadians.

We are committed to achieving a modern and efficient criminal justice system that addresses the tragic problem of overrepresentation of indigenous peoples and marginalized Canadians while holding offenders to account and protecting victims.

**Hon. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among the parties, and I think that if you seek it, you will find consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, on Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions, the House shall proceed to the consideration of ways and means motion No. 2.

*[Translation]*

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

*[English]*

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe if you seek it, you will find consent for the following motion.

*[Translation]*

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, January 29, 2020, immediately after the disposal of ways and means motion No. 2.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

*[English]*

**The Speaker:** There is one other item before everybody leaves. On the day members did me the honour of electing me as their Speaker, I spoke of my long-standing open-door policy and my intention to continue to be accessible and available to discuss ideas and concerns with my colleagues, whatever their political affiliation.

During the conversation with the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, he made a great suggestion: provide members with a suggestion box.

*[Translation]*

I thought that was an excellent idea. I am therefore very pleased to announce that, today, I will be unveiling a suggestion box, made from recycled materials, that has been installed near my office here in West Block.

I invite members to join me and the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola in the Speaker's corridor at 4 p.m. for the official unveiling of the box.

[*English*]

I encourage all members to submit their ideas on how to improve the House of Commons. I look forward to working with all of you, beginning right now in 2020.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—AUDIT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTING IN CANADA PLAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has three minutes and 40 seconds, and then we will go to questions.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that is not nearly enough time to discuss this very important issue, but I am pleased to continue my discussion on it.

As I was saying before question period began, what this really comes down to, for me at least, is what I see as a good idea that has been put forward by the Conservatives in their opposition motion. It is just perhaps the rhetoric that preceded it in the preamble that makes the motion extremely troubling to support, because if we were to support the motion, we would be supporting the preamble, and the preamble is misleading.

I am very much looking forward to the results that come out, because I have a sense that this motion will pass today. I am looking forward to the results that will come from the Auditor General. I am very proud of a lot of the infrastructure projects that have gotten off the ground in Kingston in particular—

● (1510)

**The Speaker:** At this point, I am just going to disrupt the hon. member for a moment. I know everyone is excited and is having discussions about what is going on in the hall. If members can hear my voice, please say, “Sh”.

There we go. I just want to remind everyone that there is someone making an allocation, and we want to hear what that member has to say.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, please continue.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I am very proud of a number of those infrastructure projects that have gotten off the ground in my riding.

The government has invested about \$45 million into transit, which has leveraged about another \$35 million from the province, over a 10-year period. We are building a green fleet, a new transit system, one that is built on what people want to use as opposed to a system that is built on what people have to use.

### *Business of Supply*

Some of the infrastructure that has been going on is in my riding and some of it is in various ridings throughout the country. What we know is that this stuff is actually getting done, and I am certain that the Auditor General will come to the same conclusion.

I do support the concept, the main crux of the motion. I support everything that follows the “resolve” clause, basically everything that determines the actions. However, what I cannot support is the misleading information that has gone into the preamble prior to the direction that is given in the motion.

With that, I will conclude. I am happy to take any questions.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals still have not answered the question as to why they are so opposed to having the Auditor General look at the use of taxpayer money when it comes to infrastructure projects. Many concerns have been raised, not just by opposition members but by people who have seen a difference between what has been purported to in budget papers and what has actually been spent with shovels in the ground.

I fail to see why there is such an objection to having the Auditor General, who is the custodian of public finances in our country, look into the whole extent of the investing in Canada program and provide real recommendations so that all the mistakes that have been made over the last few years will never happen again.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, I am really glad the member asked me that question. I will give him the benefit of the doubt that perhaps he did not hear my speech before question period, but he has asked the same question throughout the entire debate. In fact, I asked him a question after his speech. I specifically said that we supported the Auditor General and the work done by his office. However, we have a difficult time accepting the preamble in the motion. I asked him how he could support a motion that he knew would not address the real facts as to what actually happened.

Now we have heard another question about why we do not support the Auditor General's work, but we do. I have been saying that throughout my entire speech. We support the Auditor General and the work of his office. However, we have a problem with the misleading rhetoric in the preamble of the motion.

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands is highlighting the important role that audits play in the functioning of Parliament and the important role of audits being non-partisan and being presented as such, so we can take the criticism from audits at their value. Then we can then be better in the future.

Could the hon. member talk about the audit process as a non-partisan function and the difficulty we have with the motion that presents it in a partisan way?

● (1515)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Guelph is absolutely right in what he is suggesting as it relates to the work of the Auditor General. It is very important.

*Business of Supply*

When I first read the motion this morning, I had a difficult time figuring out its angle. I thought it seemed like a fairly decent motion. It asks for the Auditor General to weigh in on something so we can have an open and transparent process in looking at the work this government has done. It was not until I started to look into it and found that the quotes being used in the preamble were predated to another report that updated the information about what the government had been delivering.

I would really like to see the partisanship stripped away from these motions, which we see in the preamble, and have actual dialogue and discussion as to what we can do differently so we can bring forward suggestions and audits, in this case from the Auditor General, and can improve the work we do in the House.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to provide my colleague with the opportunity to provide his thoughts on an infrastructure project in his community that has made a difference or has made an impact. I am not looking for the size of it, just an infrastructure project on which he would like to provide his thoughts.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Speaker, that project would be the third crossing of the Cataraqui River in Kingston.

This project had been talked about since the 1960s. It was about connecting our community, in particular the centre-west part with the east part. We call it the "third crossing" because it is the third crossing of the river. This is a bridge. As mayor, I have fought and fought, as did my predecessors, to get money for the bridge so we could link the city together.

To be quite honest, I went in front of a lot of Conservative ministers in previous governments, asking for money and the money was never there. Through the programs that have been set up by this government, we were able to invest the \$60 million from the federal government. We then saw \$60 million from the province and \$60 million from the community as well.

This project is a perfect example of how, when we work together with municipalities and provinces, we can build meaningful infrastructure.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity since the election to address everyone in our 43rd Parliament, I want to take a moment to thank the good people of Brandon—Souris for their confidence in me and sending me to Parliament to work on their behalf. There really is no greater calling than to serve and to improve the lives of the people I represent.

During the campaign, my constituents spoke about the necessity to upgrade our aging infrastructure, and I am pleased to be able to speak to this opposition day motion.

Like many members of Parliament, I represent numerous municipalities with aging infrastructure. While most of the municipalities in my constituency are geographically large, their population and tax base are not. They rely on cost sharing with other levels of government to get projects done and to ensure their communities grow in the future. I firmly believe that one of the most important issues

members of Parliament work on is securing the necessary infrastructure funding to get things built.

Whether it is the building of a new bridge, renovating an airport, fixing roads or upgrading water and sewer facilities, these are the types of projects that foster new economic development and they ensure that communities have the capacity to grow.

While I disagreed with many aspects of the Liberals' 2015 platform, I was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt in terms of their commitment to get infrastructure built and funding out the door. After their full term in office, we know that not only did the infrastructure funding allocated in their platform not materialize, but the Liberals blew past their deficit projections. We got the debt without the projects.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for West Nova.

The Liberals are now running structural deficits for as far as the eye can see. Worst of all, we now have an infrastructure bank that is not building any infrastructure. One could be forgiven for thinking that this is an episode of BBC's *Yes Minister*. It reminds me of when they built a hospital for which they did not have any patients.

The Liberal infrastructure bank should infuriate every member of Parliament, as the taxpayers are paying millions of dollars that could be better spent on almost anything else.

In my constituency, the government freely admits that the infrastructure bank will not deliver a single new infrastructure project. It is projected that almost every rural constituency in Canada will see no benefit from the Liberal infrastructure bank, which is another signal that the Liberals are not recognizing or prioritizing the needs of smaller communities.

These perennial deficits and infrastructure delays are not what the Liberals were originally elected to do, which brings us to today's motion.

As I was elected in a by-election in the fall of November 2013, I had less than two years as a member of the governing Conservative caucus. However, in those years, we got things done.

I worked extensively with Minister Lebel and Peter Braid, who was his parliamentary secretary, so my constituency would be ready to get the projects funded. We took the time to consult with all our municipalities and the provincial leaders on our new Canada building plan, and to outline the infrastructure priorities of our region.

*Business of Supply*

We knew exactly how much funding was allocated for each year and the sorts of projects we wanted to advance. Because we collaborated and were well organized, the modernization of McGill Field, which is Brandon's bustling airport, was the first project to be funded in Manitoba under the new Building Canada plan. We had a plan, communicated the plan and then implemented that plan. This is how government should operate.

As the vast majority members of Parliament in the House are not part of the executive, we are not at the cabinet table where these decisions are made. We are not privy to the information to which ministers have access. The information we do have does not give us any comfort on how the Liberal government plans on spending the billions of infrastructure dollars it has allocated or at least talked about.

It has now become apparent that it is time to welcome the Auditor General to conduct a comprehensive audit and I would encourage his office to also do a performance review.

• (1520)

In our parliamentary system, we are presented spending bills to vote on. However, there is limited oversight on how funding is spent or how decisions are made. While some may think that members vote on specific infrastructure projects, we are only given the ability to vote on a whole envelope of funding that the minister is able to disburse. We rely on standing committees, departmental performance reports, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General to give us the information we need to do our jobs, so it is only natural that when we do have concerns we ask them to intervene. That is exactly what this motion in front of us aims to do.

While I appreciate that there is a new Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and our concerns are directly related to her predecessors, I hope that she welcomes the Auditor General to audit the programs of which she is now in charge. Anytime a minister has better information in front of him or her, it will undoubtedly lead to better decisions and results. An Auditor General's report would provide all members of Parliament with a third party and independent analysis of the government's performance.

While some Liberal MPs might be hesitant to invite the Auditor General to conduct this review, in the end it should result in more efficient and transparent ways to get infrastructure projects built. Those Liberal MPs who do not find themselves in the executive must never forget that their constituents did not send them here to defend those in high office. They want MPs to ask the tough questions of their own government, even the ones that might be uncomfortable.

We are talking about billions of dollars here. If the department and the minister do not have a coherent plan to allocate that funding for infrastructure projects, all of us in the House deserve to know. We have a responsibility to hold the government to account and demand better. If we take a historical view of what has transpired over the last four years, Liberal MPs must also acknowledge that their own government has yet to deliver what it promised.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer is also quick to note that the Liberals do not provide a list of all specific project commitments under their investing in Canada plan and their spending profiles. As

he said, "Infrastructure Canada was unable to provide the data." That is right from the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

It also goes without saying that there are some serious apprehensions about the costing in the Liberals' recent election platform, particularly in their infrastructure commitments. It is not too far of a stretch to say that the government's commitment to keeping its election promises is spotty at best. After the Liberals gave the Parliamentary Budget Officer the power to review the various party platforms, their own campaign team did not request that analysis on many of their commitments. It boggles the mind how far and how quickly their commitments to transparency evaporated. Even former minister Sohi, who was the minister of infrastructure at the time, said, "There is an information gap from our end."

Allow me to summarize how we arrived at this situation and why the official opposition put forward the motion. We know the government did not keep its promise to balance the budget. We know the Liberals set up an infrastructure bank that does not do anything. We know they do not have a plan to prioritize their infrastructure funding. We know they failed to get all their infrastructure funding allocated. We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer does not have the necessary information to know what projects the government wants to fund. We now have a minority Parliament in which to get motions passed, instead of the bewilderment we had to put up with for the past four years.

I urge my Liberal colleagues to vote in favour of the motion. Our constituents and communities expect us to get to work and put forward solutions to issues that have stalled infrastructure projects for way too long. If we are going to build a stronger Canada than the one we inherited, it starts with getting Infrastructure Canada straightened out.

• (1525)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the member, but I would first like to say as my preamble that I work great with the member. We are both on the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, and I think we work very well together and represent Canada well when we are with the other Arctic nations. I thank him for that.

All of our rural municipalities have received infrastructure projects and they are very happy about that. First, does the member applaud this?

**An hon. member:** All of them?

*Business of Supply*

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** Mr. Speaker, a Conservative is asking a question. Every single one of our municipalities received infrastructure projects. Obviously they are surprised but are very happy that we are doing that.

Second, the member made a very good point that the provinces have to put an amount of money into projects, although a smaller amount. I am not familiar with his riding and province. Does his premier put in provincial money as quickly as possible to get a project going when the federal government is ready to go?

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I have enjoyed working with him on the Arctic climate parliamentary group as well.

The member said that all of our municipalities have received funds. I think he must be talking about the Liberal ones that he represents, because we certainly have not seen them in the rural municipalities that I represent, and there are some 30 in my constituency.

My speech was about the fact that we had a plan and we delivered the plan. We talked to the municipalities, we talked to the provincial people and we got it done. We delivered the funds, which were put into water, sewer and roads. These are things that build strong communities and keep them going.

To the member's question about the present government in Manitoba, yes, it is waiting for the federal government to be involved in some major projects. Some of them will prevent disasters like the Lake Manitoba drain from taking place in the future.

• (1530)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when we look at infrastructure announcements and plans, there can be a fair amount of politics involved. I liked how the member, during his speech, underlined not only the role of the opposition in holding the government to account but also the role of the Auditor General, the non-partisan office that is so very good at cleaning through the political fog and giving Canadians the pure, unvarnished truth.

There are communities in my riding, and one in particular, that desperately need infrastructure investments to deal with the effects of climate change, the so-called green infrastructure. The Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities, the Union of B.C. Municipalities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities know, as I do, that nothing but good can come from getting this information from the Auditor General.

I would invite my colleague to expand a little more on how important it is to get the unvarnished truth so that we know effectively what we are dealing with and how we can add more efficiencies and improvements to the whole system overall.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague represents a very strong area of Canada, and we know how important infrastructure projects are for all of the things he just outlined.

That is why I included in my presentation the idea of using the Auditor General. I have had the opportunity to use the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer a number of times with regard to getting information that is pertinent to the government, particularly in

the administration and enforcement of marijuana use before it was licensed and in other areas as well. When we get independent information, we can then make solid decisions. I think it would help those on the government side, particularly in their minority position, to make use of the \$180 billion in infrastructure that they were talking about, as we know that the majority of it is in waiting from the first term of the government.

I look forward to working more collaboratively with the government with regard to making sure that some of these major infrastructure projects that need to be built are successful. An independent review from the bodies that I talked about and that my colleague asked about would be very beneficial to every member in the House and all Canadians.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I rise in the House today to speak to this important motion put together and introduced by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable, a motion calling for the Auditor General of Canada to immediately proceed with an audit regarding the government's investing in Canada plan announced back in 2016.

We all know that government investments in infrastructure are a very important part of the success of the economic development in our country, provinces and urban and rural communities. Without these investments, it is impossible to ensure strong, long-term economic development in our communities because this is directly linked to their infrastructure needs.

[*Translation*]

If a rural riding like mine has trouble developing and modernizing, residents will leave its cities, which will have a direct impact on the local economy and broaden the tax base considerably, thereby leaving the remaining population in a more vulnerable position.

[*English*]

I would like to remind our constituents that in 2015, the future Prime Minister announced that he was in favour of imposing modest deficit on Canadians, very temporary deficits, with the aim of significantly increasing his infrastructure spending from coast to coast to coast, which would boost our Canadian internal economy.

We have known for the last few years that this is totally false and that our financial situation is precarious and fragile. The former Conservative government made significant investments in this area and it is therefore difficult to understand the current situation. The Liberal government had announced in 2016 and 2017 its intention to spend \$186.7 billion over 12 years on infrastructure projects. I will say that number again, because every time I do it kind of throws me off because it is such a large number: \$186.7 billion over 12 years.

*Business of Supply*

Since this announcement, infrastructure spending has been subject to delays. Moreover, it has not actually been as high as the number that was first announced. Today I cannot explain to my constituents, the mayors, the businesses or the entrepreneurs why we are dealing with such a disproportionate deficit from the Liberal government and why the funds planned for many of our infrastructure projects are still on ice, delayed, unanswered or simply refused. I also cannot explain to them how a government that continues to boast that the Canadian economy is doing well is unable to finance its needed and urgent infrastructure projects to create jobs, contribute to economic development and ensure the survival of rural communities, particularly as job creation would significantly reduce the number of citizens in rural regions departing for larger urban centres.

In 2020, the situation is clear. The only record that the Liberals have in terms of infrastructure is their failure. Already in 2017 we learned from the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the Liberals had barely spent half of the planned infrastructure investments. The following year, in 2018, facing this complete irresponsible and unacceptable situation, the Parliamentary Budget Officer asked for the Liberal infrastructure plan in order to have a better understanding of the situation and quickly realized that the plan did not even exist.

That is not all. A year later, in 2019, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in order to help us better understand this disaster, asked for something very simple, something basic that any responsible and respectful government of hard-working taxpayers deserve to have in Canada: a list of all specific project commitments under the investing in Canada plan. However, the Liberal government has not been able to provide that data.

Again, this is totally unacceptable and irresponsible. Taxpayers in my riding, across Atlantic Canada and across the country demand the right to have a clear answer about how their money is being spent. Conservatives believe that the Auditor General of Canada must immediately investigate the matter and conduct an in-depth audit of the government's investing in Canada plan.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Given the out-of-control deficits, with more on the horizon, minimal investment in communities, job losses, dearth of job creation, lack of accountability and lack of transparency, there is clearly nothing positive coming our way under the Liberals.

[*English*]

Back at home in my beautiful riding of West Nova, there is an urgent need for infrastructure funding for our local projects. Our local economy depends on it, as I said earlier. If we want to preserve our achievements, continue to develop our markets, share our expertise and attract new investors, it is essential that our infrastructure projects get their funding.

West Nova has been waiting for years for certain pieces of infrastructure. Some, I admit, require partnership with other levels of government, which takes longer to negotiate. Some are completely the responsibility of the federal government. Roads and bridges, es-

pecially along the 100-series highways, part of the Trans-Canada system, need partnership, and so far have seen nothing.

There are a couple of interchanges that have been announced, due to their current “unsafe” listing, that need to be installed. Far too many accidents and deaths are occurring, yet before the election, a new interchange a couple of hundred kilometres away from my riding, up the highway in the South Shore riding, was announced. This underlines the government's planning process, to announce projects that are politically expedient and not announce them in other areas.

I am not saying that the Bridgewater intersection is not important, but one of the intersections in West Nova was identified as the third most dangerous interchange in Nova Scotia. You would think it would have been “safety first” when we announced these projects, but I guess not.

Speaking of safety and the effects of sea level rise, there are several instances where roads that never flooded are now flooding at every high tide. The Province of Nova Scotia applied for climate change mitigation funding, a part of this project, but it seems that these smaller projects are falling off the table. I need to see work done. My constituents need to see work done on the Rocco Point Road and many others, so that children can get to school, people can get to work and seniors can get to their doctor's appointments. God forbid there might be an emergency when there is one of these high tides.

I move now to Internet and cellphone service. This is a requirement of this century, but many parts of our riding still have poor or no service. It requires support from all levels of government to help build out these large infrastructures. The Nova Scotia government has money available. The municipalities are ready to support projects that make sense, but it seems that several of these projects have been turned down, making organizations and municipalities go back to the drawing board.

I am all for cheaper rates as a goal that has been put forward by the Liberal government; it is one that I support. Let us not forget that many Canadians do not have access to good Internet service or cellular service. I worry that the government pushing back in this respect is pushing back on the very companies that they want to partner with to provide these kinds of infrastructures.

Finally, West Nova probably has the highest seafood landings in all Canada, and the fishers rely on government-owned infrastructure to bring their catches in safely. These ports, in many cases, are anything but safe. Some of them are actually falling into the water. Due to chronic underfunding of these structures over the years, I estimate they will require almost \$500 million of investment. Some fall under DFO and small craft harbours, like Port Maitland, East Pubnico and Pubnico, but others, like Digby, due to the failed divestiture program of the Chrétien Liberals, fall under this larger invisible program. Digby has become the safe harbour on the eastern side on the Bay of Fundy.

*Business of Supply*

We are responsible to provide safe harbour for those boats and fishers who will find themselves in unsafe situations due to weather. We can see Digby's usage swell to close to 135 vessels, which is effectively almost double the capacity of that port. They need help. The fishery is important, and it is time we actually paid attention to it.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Today, in Ottawa, I am working hard to ensure that West Nova's infrastructure projects get their fair share of funding so they can be completed.

[English]

When I was a provincial MLA, I always did everything in my power to defend Nova Scotia's interests. Until Conservatives form the next government, I want to ensure that the current Liberal government finally provides the answers to all Canadian taxpayers that they are entitled to receive.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am curious to hear the member opposite's response to this observation. The infrastructure program is not a program where the federal government picks and chooses priorities in different municipalities or provinces. Provinces open up the application process to municipalities, municipalities choose their priorities, the provinces sign off on them and then the funding flows. There are two components to that which are critically important.

One is that it is the cities that drive the priority setting, but provinces can actually play a role in that. In my home province of Ontario, the Ford government has gone out of its way not to approve anything. In fact, it has not opened up many of the files to get our dollars flowing. The second part of it, something the PBO corrected in the second report but not the first report, is that when a \$20-million bridge is approved, we do not send a cheque for \$20 million to the municipality. The municipality sends us the receipts and we cash out the project, which means the commitment is there, but the dollars do not flow until the project is built. Sometimes cities do not get them built as quickly as we would like, but, nonetheless, the dollars are still committed there for future governments.

Is the member aware of those two criteria and could the Conservatives assist us in making provincial premiers, particularly a few Conservative ones I could name, get the dollars flowing?

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Mr. Speaker, I live in a province that is represented by a Liberal premier who has trouble signing off on projects with the current Liberal government. I do not understand why that continues to happen. We have a 100-series highway system that has a number of unsafe interchanges. Some have been listed, by their own work, as the most dangerous in the province and yet in a Liberal-held riding, an interchange that was not on the list was approved before an election. I am sorry, but it looks like cronyism at its best.

• (1545)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague made reference to the

problems that his community is facing with regard to climate change, especially the amount of infrastructure that his community is looking at to mitigate those effects and adapt to them. It is happening in my community and in many others.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives' climate change plan in the last election was largely panned as being completely ineffective against the greenhouse gases that are causing this in the first place, and I am wondering if he could square that circle. It seems to me that if we are going to be effective, how much money are we prepared to spend to adapt to climate change and when are we going to see some effective policies coming from the Conservatives?

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Mr. Speaker, my riding has been seeing the effects of climate change for many years. When I talk about unsafe harbours, I am talking about wharves that are coming to the edge of the high-water marks. I am talking about roads that are under water at high tides. The Town of Annapolis has declared what is called a climate war because by 2050 it is going to find itself under water. It needs humongous pieces of infrastructure to maintain the cradle of Canada in Annapolis Royal.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to welcome this new member to the House representing West Nova. I appreciate very much that in his first speech in this place, he is focused on the issue of climate change and how it affects his riding of West Nova.

We know that the previous member for Cumberland—Colchester used to draw attention to the extreme threats of sea level rise. In particular, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identified more than a decade ago that in addition to New Orleans, probably the piece of land mass in North America most vulnerable to sea level rise would be the Tantramar Marshes, the piece of land that connects Nova Scotia to New Brunswick.

I want to ask the hon. member if he does not think that infrastructure funds are appropriately targeted to this question of both mitigating climate impacts and adapting to them.

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont:** Mr. Speaker, that is what we are trying to find out, whether there is enough money in the \$186.7 billion that is being invested in infrastructure. How much is there to mitigate these kinds of things? The Tantramar Marshes are a good example. Grand-Pré and in and around that area is a very important historic part of Canada that we need to make sure is preserved. It has a number of dike systems around it. There was some investment in that, but we are still not seeing what we need across this country.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here to speak on an important topic that impacts Canadians from coast to coast to coast. The region I live in, York region, will see over a quarter of the population growth in Ontario settle there in the coming years. With that, the need for new modern infrastructure investments will be even greater.

Economic activity in York region is second to none. We are an area of almost 1.3 million people. There are leading technology, auto parts, auto manufacturers and tech companies in York region. Modern infrastructure is necessary to get our families and kids home safely in the evenings. It is necessary to have the resources for Internet in rural areas in Canada, including the northern areas in York region.

Before I begin speaking specifically about some of the actions we have taken and specific funds, I want to say that our government is committed to investing in infrastructure across Canada. We are committed in our plan.

When we talk about deficits, we know the prior government left a number of deficits. It left an infrastructure deficit, a social deficit, a green deficit and a cultural deficit. It did that because it had no plan to invest in Canadians.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, I hear some of my colleagues on the other side agreeing with what I said. I thank them for those comments, and I look forward to their questions afterwards.

What I will say is we have worked. We have signed bilateral agreements with provinces and territories from coast to coast to coast. We have been working with the cities. We have worked with the FCM. There has been no better relationship for representatives at the table for stakeholders, whether it is mayors, chairs of regional areas or premiers. We have worked in tandem. The door to our government has been open to ensure that projects that are identified by the cities as key projects, and we know it goes bottom up, are paramount for investment.

Looking at the government record, we can see that 4,800 projects have been started and are in different stages of construction, and we can see the \$57 billion that has been approved. We are working well with our partners. This is a much different story than what happened in the past. That was not a story we could tell in this chamber that we are privileged to sit in, representing our constituents.

With that, I would like to focus my remarks today on the essential importance of partnerships and the partnerships we have seen through the green municipal fund. The green municipal fund is currently a \$1.5-billion revolving fund administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to help support municipal sustainability, innovation, across the country.

It was under a previous Liberal government that the GMF was created as an important policy instrument for gaining experience in the development and execution of sustainability projects. Working together, in collaboration with all levels of government across this beautiful country that we live in, we are continuing to execute the

building of necessary infrastructure that we all need for a successful, productive and prosperous country that we call home.

Working together, we have established and are sharing best practices and lessons learned, and improving the overall environmental performance of municipal installations.

Federal government involvement with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities green municipal fund is a reminder of how well the federal government can work with funding organizations and other key stakeholders to support the efforts of municipalities in achieving their environmental sustainability goals.

We know how important climate change is. It was great to announce, in York region, funds allocated to the disaster mitigation fund. It was great to announce, in York region, funds dedicated to waste and waste-water treatment facilities. Those types of dedicated funding sources improve quality of life and productivity in our region. That is what we will continue to do as a federal government, working with the regional authorities, our municipalities and the Province of Ontario.

I want to state that I will be sharing my time with my friend and hon. colleague, the member for Ottawa Centre.

How can these goals be achieved? Our government is in strong partnership with the green municipal fund, which provides financial support to municipalities with environmental projects related to brownfields, energy, water, transportation and integrated community plans.

● (1550)

Since 2000, the GMF has supported more than 1,200 municipal sustainability initiatives through its unique mix of training, resources and funding. Of the initiatives funded to date, 199 have been capital projects that involved retrofitting, construction, replacement, expansion or purchase and installation of fixed assets or infrastructure.

These capital projects have cumulatively helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over two million tonnes, improve the quality of about 700,000 cubic metres of soil, treat more than 240,000 cubic metres of wastewater per year, make about 80 hectares of previously contaminated land available for use, reduce water consumption by almost 310,000 cubic metres per year, and divert 170,000 tonnes of waste from landfill per year.

Again, we are making progress in our plan to invest in Canada and in Canadians through our \$180-billion-plus infrastructure plan. It is transformational. It answers the call of climate change and it answers the call of a growing population and the need to replace aging infrastructure.

*Business of Supply*

We know what the deficit is. We know the deficit was less. We are chipping away at it. We are working well with FCM. We are working well with our big city mayors. We are working well with the provinces. We are at the table. We are signing those bilateral agreements and, most important, we are listening to the cities and to their priorities.

The GMF is delivered by the FCM on behalf of Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada and Infrastructure Canada. Our job as the government is to provide oversight of GMF operations through the GMF council and the peer review committee.

For the record, the GMF council is made up of 15 members, five of which are federal. The council advises the FCM on the management of GMF. The council is made up of federal representatives from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada and Infrastructure Canada; municipal officials; and external members representing the public, private, academic and environmental sectors.

The peer review committee comprises 75 members, 20 being federal. This committee provides the GMF and the federal council members with expert environmental science as well as clean technology advice, analysis of funding proposals and the evaluation of the environmental outcomes of the projects that are funded.

In 2000, the Government of Canada created two complementary GMF funds, the first being the green municipal enabling fund and the second being the green municipal investment fund, where program delivery was delegated to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. They know best.

Whether in rural Canada or urban Canada, in whatever jurisdiction and whatever province we may call home, the mayors and the local city councillors know best the needs of their cities. Whether it is housing being built, investments in sidewalks or investments in local soccer fields for kids to play on safely, they know and we are listening to them and partnering with them. For more than four years, there has been no better partner for the cities in Canada than this government, and this will continue.

Over the course of 2000-2005, the Government of Canada endowed the Federation of Canadian Municipalities with \$550 million to establish the GMF. This amount comprised an initial endowment of \$125 million in budget 2000, a subsequent endowment of \$125 million in 2001, and \$300 million in 2005. In 2005, a new funding agreement was signed, merging the green municipal enabling fund and the green municipal investment fund into a single green municipal fund.

Moving forward, when we brought in budget 2016, the Government of Canada committed an additional \$125 million to the GMF as part of Infrastructure Canada's investing in Canada plan.

We know the investing in Canada plan is making a difference in the daily lives of commuters and in the daily lives of citizens across this country, whether they take public transportation or need their own vehicle to commute to work or take their kids to a soccer field, an ice hockey rink, baseball field or to get some STEM lessons, which we know are so important in tomorrow's economy.

This subsequently brought the total endowment to \$625 million. To manage this additional funding from budget 2016, a new funding agreement was signed in 2018 by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Infrastructure Canada and FCM. Again, we are partnering with the partners that know best where these dollars need to flow to and need to be invested.

Budget 2019, I am proud to say, provided an additional \$950 million for the GMF transfer through NRCan. The \$950 million will support three new program streams, planned for launch in late spring or early 2020. They are focused on increasing energy efficiency. The programs are low-carbon cities Canada, sustainable affordable housing and innovation, and community eco-efficiency acceleration.

To date, the Government of Canada has invested a total of \$1.5 billion in the GMF, of which the FCM is to hold over \$1 billion in perpetuity. It is in an annuity, in terms of being able to invest continually without seeing a sunset clause of when those funds will not be there. Long-term strategic investments can be made in what is best for the cities and towns that we call home across this country.

• (1555)

This additional funding will help accelerate the government's climate change objectives, specifically financing investments at the municipal level and energy efficiency in residential, commercial and multi-unit buildings. FCM anticipates the end of the five-year current plan for the GMF in 2023.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple request. Throughout the last several years, we have seen the PBO, in its 2017 estimates and supplementary estimates commentary, saying there were billions missing from the infrastructure fund. We saw that with Mr. Fréchette, and we see it with the current PBO comment in 2018 that money cannot be located.

A Senate report investigating this infrastructure money came up with a finalized part of the report saying there was no metric for success for infrastructure spending apart from the fact that money was spent. It was not carbon reduction, not roads built, not Canadians' health. The government's only metric was that the money was spent.

Why are Liberals opposing having the Auditor General look at this vital issue of money for taxpayers? What are they trying to hide? What are they afraid of?

*Business of Supply*

• (1600)

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, this morning I read one of the PBO reports that says 900,000 Canadians are going to be taken off the tax rolls with our increase to the basic personal exemption amount and 21 million Canadians will receive a tax break, that is, more tax dollars in their pockets.

I look forward to the PBO undertaking more analysis of our government proposals and plans to invest in Canada and Canadians to keep growing our economy, creating jobs and lifting people out of poverty, because that is what we ran on in 2015 and that is what we ran on in 2019. I look forward to the PBO undertaking further analysis.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague completely avoided answering my question. What is the government trying to hide? Why are the Liberals trying to block the Auditor General from reporting on supposedly \$180 billion of spending? By the way, over half of that, according to Library and Archives Canada, was money committed by the previous Harper government, so it is not all brand new money. What is the government trying to hide?

I would ask my colleague to stand, look at the camera and tell taxpayers why Liberals are blocking the Auditor General from investigating this project and this plan.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the Auditor General for the work it has done over the decades for Canadian taxpayers. That is a focus in my riding and for my constituents. They know that we have invested in 4,800 projects since the start of our plan with over \$57 billion invested. We will continue to work with our partners at the regional, municipal and provincial levels to ensure those dollars flow out the door and into vital infrastructure, whether it is fighting climate change or investing in public transportation and so on.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, going back to the last two questions that have come from the Conservatives, we have been saying all day that we are not against getting the information to be able to make sure there is openness and transparency with respect to what is going on. What we are against is the fact that there is misleading information in the preamble of the motion.

The reality of the situation is that the Parliamentary Budget Officer came back later on and confirmed that the government had provided everything it was looking for. The Conservatives are cherry-picking the quotes they want to use, which is disingenuous at best when we talk about bringing forward a motion before the House.

I am wondering if the member could comment on how important it is that we see openness and transparency in the work that the Auditor General can do with respect to this.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** Mr. Speaker, openness and transparency are at the forefront of our government in everything we do, day in and day out. We live in a democracy and Canadians demand to know the answers and to have transparency in the government. We know that. We look forward to continuing to work with the Auditor General on many issues, including looking at our infrastructure plans and other things. We need to make sure of the facts. In the opposition motion some statements are incorrect, and we need those corrected.

**Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to our government's commitment to building strong, sustainable communities that will benefit Canadians for generations.

As the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, I have three main priorities. First is to work with provinces, territories and municipalities, as well as indigenous peoples, to get projects built quickly that improve the quality of life for all Canadians. Second is to build projects that grow our economy, create jobs and boost Canada's productivity. Third is to ensure that our projects help build a low-carbon and more resilient future.

• (1605)

There is one thing I know when it comes to infrastructure: When Canada builds, Canada grows. There is hard data to back this up. The finance minister's task force on the economy identified infrastructure as the most powerful driver of growth and productivity in both the short and long term, growing local economies, growing the Canadian economy and creating good jobs from coast to coast to coast. Countless studies have pointed to infrastructure investments as one of the best ways to prepare for the economy of the future. As we face the stark reality of climate change and how to manage it, we know there is also an enormous economic opportunity staring us in the face.

As former governor of the Bank of Canada Mark Carney has said repeatedly, the new lower-carbon economy is worth trillions and trillions of dollars. Building clean, smart, sustainable and resilient infrastructure will put Canada on the front foot as we manage the transition to a low-carbon economy. The benefits are obvious. It begins with improving the lives of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Our infrastructure investments are improving Canadians' quality of life, creating jobs, growing our economy and building a healthier, more climate-resilient future. Just think of the Montreal metro blue line, the Quebec City tramway, the Champlain Bridge and affordable housing across the country.

[*English*]

Consider the Gordie Howe bridge between Windsor and Detroit. It is a key economic corridor that will transform the movement of goods between Canada and our most important trading partner, the United States. That is a smart investment in future growth, something I am proud our government supports.

*Business of Supply*

Public transit is a huge part of what we do at Infrastructure Canada. It is key to a more sustainable economy. It is critical to supporting growth in our cities. It is about getting people around faster, cleaner and cheaper. Our government has committed \$28 billion to public transit.

We are funding important projects right across the country, from the Millennium Line in Vancouver to electric buses in Guelph. Just a couple of weeks ago I was in Guelph, Ontario, to help announce the city's green transit project. This will replace 35 diesel buses with long-range electric buses, as well as install on-route charging stations. This funding will also help purchase an additional 30 electric buses and build a new bus storage facility fitted with electric charging stations.

The opportunity to electrify bus fleets across Canada is huge. It is why we have committed to help public transit authorities procure up to 5,000 electric buses for their fleets over the next five years. Guess what. We have companies right here in Canada that can help meet that demand. Last week, I saw first-hand in Winnipeg the amazing work that New Flyer is doing in bringing electric buses to market.

[*Translation*]

Nova Bus is another international leader in the electric bus technology market. STM, the Société de transport de Montréal, has already implemented an electric bus pilot project and will shortly be putting more electric buses in service later this year. Quebec is a leader in Canada when it comes to electric vehicles.

The government is working with Quebec and other partners, such as Hydro-Québec, to install charging stations across Quebec. In fact, by the end of the year, Quebec will have more public charging stations than gas stations. Let us not forget the investments made by the Canada Infrastructure Bank. In Montreal, projects like the Réseau express métropolitain and the Contrecoeur port will increase productivity, reduce pollution, transportation and commute times, and, ultimately, get people and goods to where they need to go faster.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Some communities have seen the future of clean infrastructure and are doing amazing things right now, and it is not just big cities. Summerside, P.E.I., with a population of 15,000, is one example.

I had the opportunity to visit there just a few weeks ago. With the help of our government, the province and the private sector, the city is moving forward to build its own solar energy farm and storage facility. This project will allow Summerside to meet nearly two-thirds of its electricity needs through renewable energy, as well as reduce carbon emissions by 21,000 tonnes a year. It is also creating good jobs in Summerside and helping to grow a clean, local economy. That is green infrastructure in action, making lives better for the people of Summerside and reducing emissions for Canada and the world.

There is also the stuff we cannot see but that makes the lives of Canadians better.

In Ottawa, a major project is under way that almost nobody really knows about, but for those who use the Ottawa River, it will ensure that water is cleaner for swimming, drinking and fishing. The combined sewage storage tunnel, a federal, provincial and municipal partnership, will allow the city to largely eliminate the discharge of sewage into the Ottawa River after a big rainstorm. With climate change, we know that severe weather events are more and more common. For our government, those are \$62 million well spent.

There are projects like this one right across the country.

In Fredericton, New Brunswick, we are investing in flood protection. Once complete, this project will help protect over 27,500 residents within a 12-square-kilometre area. The city says that it will reduce the number of people directly affected by future flooding by 83%. It is also expected to provide long-term savings in recovery and replacement costs for people, government and businesses. These are important investments that will ensure people's communities are resilient.

I have highlighted a few specific projects today, but the reality is I could talk all afternoon about the thousands of projects our government has funded.

To date, Infrastructure Canada has invested in 4,700 projects across the country, making a real difference in the lives of Canadians. This is four times the number of projects built under the Conservatives. If we consider all the infrastructure projects across the federal government, we are investing in 52,000 projects with provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous peoples. That translates to thousands of new buses, light rail, transit vehicles and tracks to help Canadians get where they need. It translates into new systems that produce cleaner electricity; communities that will substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions and cleaner, safer drinking water; high-quality water treatment plants that protect our homes, families and communities; and affordable housing that is needed across the country.

To make this happen, we are working closely with our partners, including the provinces, territories, municipalities and indigenous peoples, who together own approximately 98% of all core public infrastructure. We are doing that work collaboratively, responsibly and quickly to build infrastructure that makes the lives of Canadians better.

When Canada builds, Canada grows. We want to help Canadians everywhere to build a better future.

*Business of Supply*

[*Translation*]

When Canada builds, Canada grows. We are working with Canadians from coast to coast to coast to build a cleaner, more prosperous future.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for sharing her vision of the infrastructure plan.

I am a little disappointed, but I was expecting the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to give a long list of all the projects that have been approved in recent years, because the list is long. As the minister said, she could have spent all afternoon reading it. However, this does not answer the Parliamentary Budget Officer's questions about the planning of these projects and the expected results.

The minister talked at length about results related to climate change and greenhouse gas reduction. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer made it clear that there is currently no mechanism for verifying whether approved infrastructure projects will have an impact on climate change or for determining that impact.

All the same, that was one of the objectives. It was part of the government's nice little slogans, like the ones the minister just uttered, such as “building Canada” or “building a better future”. However, everything depends on the information provided to parliamentarians, not the slogans.

Does the minister not believe that parliamentarians of all stripes are entitled to the same information the government has, so they can make informed decisions about the infrastructure plan? Do they not have the right to know whether a plan exists for the funds that were not invested in 2016-17 and 2017-18?

• (1615)

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Speaker, our government is open and transparent, and we welcome public and parliamentary oversight of our historic infrastructure program, the investing in Canada plan. I am actually pleased to see that members opposite are now taking an interest in our investments to grow the economy, build better communities and fight climate change.

I would like to point out that, during the last election campaign, the Conservatives said they would slash \$18 million from our infrastructure investments. Canadians, in contrast, decided to move forward and invest in a better future for their children and grandchildren. Canadians want to know which projects the Conservatives would like to cancel. Will it be Montreal's blue line, the Quebec City tramway, the Champlain Bridge or affordable housing?

[*English*]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding in the Cowichan Valley, the Cowichan River, which has long been a source of inspiration for the first peoples who have lived there, a very deep, historical and cultural significance, is really starting to feel the effects of climate change. One of the proposals to help us save that river is to build a new weir so we can hold more lake supply water back in Lake Cowichan and control the flow during the dry spring and summer months.

I look at the motion before us today and the crux of the matter is that we want to see if the plan is living up to its stated goals and promises. The Auditor General's office plays a very important role to help us, as parliamentarians, to see if it is actually doing that.

Why is the minister's government so against us getting this information to see if we can try and find more efficiencies in the plan and give our constituents, who need this funding, the information they need to make the appropriate applications for the resources necessary to get the funding in the first place?

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Speaker, openness and transparency are hallmarks of our government. We certainly welcome parliamentary and public scrutiny.

On the project that the member has asked about with respect to the Cowichan Valley, I am happy to speak with him. We are looking at ways to ensure we can support municipalities facing the huge impacts of climate change. We want to enhance programs to ensure they are accessible for municipalities. This sounds like a project that is worth pursuing. I am happy to work with the member opposite.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her speech, her election and her appointment as minister.

Only 2% of infrastructure spending involves infrastructure that falls under federal jurisdiction. The other 98% comes under provincial responsibility. The problem with the government's plan is that the money is not getting to the provinces.

The municipalities and the provincial government want a return to the Conservative government's plan, the Building Canada fund. We must give credit where credit is due. The municipalities were satisfied with that fund, apart from the fact that there was not enough money, but nothing is ever perfect. It is great to have lots of money, but it must trickle down to where it is needed, one way or another.

How will the government go about giving the money back to the provinces as quickly as possible? They are the ones that know how to manage that money, and it must be done quickly.

**Hon. Catherine McKenna:** Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate my opposition colleague on his election.

We are definitely working with the provinces and territories. That is vital to the projects and investments we are undertaking. We are working with the Province of Quebec on municipal files such as Montreal's blue line, the Quebec City tramway, the Champlain Bridge and affordable housing, to name but a few. Of course it is very important. I have already had the chance to talk to my counterpart. In fact, I have many counterparts in Quebec, and I will continue to work with them.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

**Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mission—Mat-squi—Fraser Canyon.

I rise today on the opposition day motion regarding this mind-boggling infrastructure spending debacle that the Liberal government has gotten itself into.

It is a very simple motion that would allow the Auditor General to determine whether “the government’s Investing in Canada Plan, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises; and that the Auditor General of Canada report his findings to the House no later than one year following the adoption of this motion.”

The program that the Liberals had come up with was supposed to do a few things. It was going to have these tiny deficits that would improve economic growth. They said that the program would improve productivity and suggested it would create a lower-carbon environment. All of those things are measurables and should have outcomes that we can look at. There is no accountability and there are no measurables.

Therefore, this is not about the spending necessarily, but the principles of the program. It is about no deliverables, no follow-up, no transparency, no economic growth and no tracking of productivity, all the things the Liberals promised to do within the program. It is important for taxpayers to see they are getting value for the dollar.

The way the Liberals have crafted this program, there are over 50 individual programs scattered over 32 departments. It is like an octopus across government, with very serious gaps. It is like Swiss cheese. It is really difficult for anybody to determine where the spending is and whether we are getting value for the spending.

Looking at this from my business background, if I had a strategic plan that was to make some investments and spend some money, I would certainly have measurables and outcomes and I would be able to report back to the shareholders that we were getting the things we said we were going to invest in. This, according to the PBO, is sadly lacking.

From the taxpaying end, the funding recipients are not being held accountable. When the cash is being put out, it should certainly be incumbent upon the grantees to report back to government. We should be able to see results from them and they seem to be amiss on this.

Most of the projects in place, according to the PBO, have either been behind schedule in delivery or have not even been started, and there should be some accountability around that. This is why the Conservatives are asking the Auditor General to look at this use of funds and ensure we are getting these deliveries.

One of the reasons the deliveries are behind schedule is because the government has gone ahead with funding portions before the provincial governments have been able to come up with all the money. There seems to be a lack of coordination, another thing on which the Auditor General could report back. Sometimes provinces are not even contributing to shared projects and shared costs because the feds are not collaborating in advance.

Therefore, there are a lot of flaws and problems within the program, and we are here to protect taxpayer money. We are here to ensure there is accountability for any kind of investment spent and we get the results we expect.

On the productivity front, all the spending was supposed to enable or increase it; However, in good old Liberal fashion, the government has not been able to tell us if it has been able to increase productivity, and that was one of the main goals of the program. Therefore, some kinds of measures should be in place to ensure we get productivity. In fact, on the spending side, only 3% goes toward trade and transportation, which strikes me as a big productivity issue in the country, and we are not investing in it.

We seem to get a lot of answers that are predominantly word soup and we do not really get the hard answers for which we are looking.

On failed spending, the PBO has shown that the Liberals have failed even to get their own infrastructure money out the door and that infrastructure money lapses 60% per year for the first two years. One cannot force-feed the infrastructure with potential amounts of money. These projects have to be well thought out and designed so we get the outcomes on productivity and growth. We certainly are not seeing that today.

• (1620)

The truth is that nobody really knows what is being spent. This business of spreading it out over a large area into a bunch of different programs and departments makes me think it is like a shell game that we would see at the circus: Where is the ball? We never know where the ball is. That is what this looks like. We are having a hard time finding the truth.

The PBO analysis also showed that despite all of the promises and spending, there was no annual increase in infrastructure in Canada. Here is a quote: “Never has a politician boasted so loudly and spent so much to achieve so little.” That was Andrew Scheer. Just 3% of spending is designated for trade- and efficiency-enhancing infrastructure that would increase productivity and GDP.

All in all, the reason we want the Auditor General to get involved is that there is a lack of transparency. The PBO asked some very specific questions about very specific projects and could not get any answers. They said it was a secret, so the projects could not be divulged.

It strikes me that if we really want to make improving the economy and dealing with productivity our goals, then no one should have an issue with a motion like this. It is just good governance to get the Auditor General involved. It is not uncommon to ask for something like this, and it is worthy in this particular case. The motion certainly should have the support of all parties.

I fail to understand why anyone would have difficulty with asking the Auditor General to review this entire program to make sure that the core fundamentals are fulfilled. The core fundamentals that the government said it wanted to be accountable for were productivity, an increase in GDP and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. It is not too much to ask the Auditor General to look at that and report back to the House in a timely fashion. It would be in the best interests of taxpayers. That is why we are here. We need to make sure that taxpayers get the answers they deserve in a timely fashion.

• (1625)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the limits placed upon the Office of the Auditor General is that it cannot investigate jurisdictions outside the mandate of Parliament. In other words, provincial, indigenous and municipal governments are not part of the scope of work that the Auditor General could do.

In Manitoba, close to 90% of the money has not been opened up for applications from municipalities. We just need to talk to a Manitoba mayor to find out very quickly where the frustration lies. It is not in our program; it is the provincial governments that somehow do not want to spend money on infrastructure, even though even MPs in this chamber are asking for those dollars to be spent.

How is the Auditor General going to uncork the challenges we are having in provincial capitals where Conservative premiers are refusing to participate with the infrastructure program? Ontario is just not opening up the avenues for applications, and mayors are screaming and begging Conservatives to invest in their communities. How do we get the Auditor General to investigate the behaviour of provincial premiers who seem pretty stubborn and pretty determined not to build a good country?

**Mr. James Cumming:** Mr. Speaker, the program was designed by the Liberal Party, so one would think that when designing the program, the Liberals would have thought that through. When commitments such as an increase in GDP, an increase in productivity and lower greenhouse gas emissions are made by the government, one would think that the government would understand that it has to have some input from the people to whom it is granting the capital.

The other issue that arises is the philosophy of additional spending. A lot of provincial governments are struggling with their own budgets. When we come with money, they are not in a position to borrow in a timely fashion. This concept of increasing debt across federal, provincial, and municipal governments is likely giving some grief to this program as well. It certainly is an issue across Canada. My province is certainly conscious of it.

• (1630)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the days when I was in the opposition, we called upon the Harper government to invest more into Canada's infrastructure. It was a very low priority of the former Harper government. The

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new government, in 2015, made a decision to invest in all regions of Canada and to work with municipalities and provinces.

One of the areas in which there is concern, as my colleague and friend from Vaughan mentioned, is that different provinces participated at different levels. The government has been looking at ways to ensure that there are sincere, genuine investments in infrastructure throughout the country.

I look to my colleague across the way and ask him this. If he were in government, what would he do to solicit additional support from those provinces that are somewhat reluctant to invest in infrastructure in the way this national government is investing?

**Mr. James Cumming:** Mr. Speaker, the suggestion in the preamble that the former Conservative government was not interested in infrastructure is a bit of a fallacy. We were certainly interested in infrastructure and made significant investments in infrastructure, particularly in infrastructure that increased productivity, allowed us to be more competitive and helped with Canada's competitive advantage.

I would suggest if the program is designed to do that and can help generate revenues for provinces and municipalities and improve their productivity, there would be a better chance for success.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask my hon. colleague if he has had an opportunity to chat with some of his provincial counterparts, as I have in Alberta, who are very willing to work with the federal government in areas of joint interest but have found a very unwilling partner.

Could my colleague elaborate on whether he has had the opportunity to speak to any of his provincial counterparts?

**Mr. James Cumming:** Mr. Speaker, certainly I have had an opportunity to speak to them. The balance that they are struggling with, particularly in Alberta, is large-scale deficits, mostly because of the issues that we have in trying to get our resources to market. The government's program of bills has not allowed us to get our resources to market.

What I hear from the government is that certainly it would like to invest more into infrastructure. However, there is a problem doing it when we have a government that is completely against trying to get Alberta resources to market.

**The Deputy 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 Courtenay—Alberni, Fisheries and Oceans; the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, Privacy; the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon, Agriculture.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Edmonton Centre for sharing his time with me today.

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All of us in the House, irrespective of party, share probably two key things in common: We collect big paycheques from the taxpayer, and our constituents speak to us about infrastructure probably every single week. How are these two facts related? Canadians pay a lot of taxes and expect their government to work for them. They expect all of us in the House, irrespective of party, to work for them as well.

Unfortunately, we all know that government does not always work for the people who pay for it. The same goes for the House. Therefore, today I am here to push. I am here to urge our ministers to demand their departments and the public service move forward and get infrastructure built, to provide the services we as Canadians collectively need and to do so in a transparent manner.

As my colleague, the MP for Mégantic—L'Érable, stated in his motion, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has reported that budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7-billion infrastructure spending plan and that the PBO requested the new plan, but it does not exist.

Will budget 2020 contain a new and transparent plan? I can say that members on this side of the House are not holding our breath. However, I am not losing hope. That is why we are calling on the Auditor General to immediately audit the Liberal government's investing in Canada plan including, but not limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises, and that the Auditor General report his findings to the House within one year.

In my riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, the District of Mission has been working tirelessly to replace its aging sanitary sewer pipe that crosses beneath the Fraser River to a treatment plant in Abbotsford.

Close to 50,000 people rely on this critical piece of infrastructure. However, the existing pressurized pipe is over 30 years old. It is at capacity and at risk of failure. According to the district's engineers and staff, it is not a question of if but when this pipe fails.

The environmental impact of raw sewage lining the banks of the Fraser River would be unprecedented. It would affect millions of British Columbians, not to mention the devastation that would be done to our five iconic Pacific salmon species.

In 2017, the District of Mission was allocated \$6.9 million from senior levels of government through the clean water and wastewater fund. However, as has been the case for infrastructure projects across the country, only a small portion of that funding was actually transferred to the district.

As a result of years of Liberal dithering, construction costs have skyrocketed. Government reviews at the federal and provincial levels have bogged down the process with red tape, and people are really frustrated.

Therefore, right now I am asking, and have thanked the hon. parliamentary secretary earlier today, for an immediate cash injection and intervention by the federal government to see the Mission sanitary sewer crossing project through to completion.

Sanitary sewers are an essential service for growing communities everywhere and ensure our environment is protected for future gen-

erations. I cannot stress enough the importance of moving quickly on this infrastructure issue.

Another big issue in my riding in the community of Abbotsford is the expansion of Highway No. 1. It connects the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley to the rest of the province and our country, and has required expansion for decades. This two-lane stretch of highway sees over 40,000 users per day and motor vehicle accidents have soared to over 1,000 per year. According to ICBC, between the years 2015 and 2017, the number of motor vehicle accidents from Langley to Chilliwack doubled, to 1,100.

With traffic volumes already exceeding peak capacity, Highway No. 1 poses an alarming risk to travellers, especially in a disaster scenario where the Abbotsford International Airport would have to support the entire region as the alternate to the Vancouver International Airport.

As a result of the positive growth and increase in capacity at our ports, truck traffic volume has also increased, commuter numbers have risen and people are bogged down in traffic every day. I hear more about highway congestion than any other issue in my riding.

● (1635)

Speed, incidentally, is what the Liberal government promised and announced in budget 2016. In phase one of the government's new infrastructure plan, it was supposed to focus on short-term economic stimulus. Well, we are in 2020 now and nothing has happened. In fact, my colleagues and I met with the Parliamentary Budget Officer's staff yesterday, who shockingly indicated that not only had the government's key objectives not been achieved, but the Liberals have no way of tracking their current progress on infrastructure spending.

Communities across my riding in British Columbia have applied for infrastructure funding, many under the community, culture and recreation infrastructure program, the last deadline of which was January 23, 2019, over a year ago.

How can infrastructure programs supposedly designed to provide immediate economic stimulus take over a year to process? Just what exactly are the federal and provincial ministries doing? How many times are applications being shuffled from a desk in Victoria to a desk in Ottawa and back again?

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The District of Lillooet asked me to support the needed improvements to their hockey rink. They need to replace the ammonia refrigeration plant at their rec centre with a safer carbon dioxide refrigeration plant. Cache Creek is still recovering from devastating floods in 2017. Harrison Hot Springs needs its Miami River lift station upgraded, another sewage sanitary project. Agassiz needs support for an indoor pool. Their only pool is outdoors and 40 years old. The Village of Lytton and, in fact, all of the rural communities that I represent in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon need infrastructure for broadband Internet. The list of infrastructure projects requiring federal support goes on and on, and I am not unaware that this is the case in every other riding as well.

Sadly, the mishmash of programs, red tape and bureaucratic hoops is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, for small and rural municipalities to navigate. The PBO reports that the investing in Canada plan consists of over 50 individual government funding programs administered by 32 government departments and agencies and that, using public documents, it is literally impossible to reconcile the taxpayer money that has been allocated with the money that has been spent. Asked to describe the situation, as I mentioned in the House earlier today, the PBO said it is an octopus across government with serious information gaps. To boot, many of the Liberals' priorities for this funding defy logic.

Take the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, for instance, where the Liberal government signed over \$256 million to this Beijing-controlled entity. Somewhat closer to home, consider the Canada Infrastructure Bank, where finance minister Morneau has confirmed that small municipalities, the municipalities I represent, will not benefit since global investors will only invest in large transformational projects that produce a revenue stream from which they can earn a high rate of return on their investment. Small and medium-sized municipalities in rural Canada are nonetheless out of \$15 billion in infrastructure funding to pay for it.

In conclusion, the Trudeau Liberals' so-called infrastructure plan has been a failure today, and the PBO predicts continued failure. Deficits have risen to staggering levels, yet Statistics Canada's infrastructure economic account shows almost no increase in infrastructure spending in Canada. Between 2015 and 2018, the most recent years available, annual inflation-adjusted infrastructure investment went from \$70.7 billion to \$71.5 billion. That is only a \$0.8-billion annual increase in infrastructure, despite a staggering \$35 billion in infrastructure spending allocated over a three-year period. Canadians deserve better. Canadians deserve to know where their money is being used and how it is being used to effectively to serve them and that it is not being lost in a bureaucratic maze.

Let us let the Auditor General do his work, audit the infrastructure program and increase transparency over how taxpayer dollars are spent to improve our communities.

• (1640)

**The Deputy Speaker:** A brief reminder to hon. members to avoid the use of names of other hon. members. It does happen from time to time. I know that in the last two speeches there was not any disorder arising from that, but nevertheless it is a good habit to get into.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Surrey—Newton.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon said, Canadians have to be reminded where the government has invested, but under the Harper government there was not a single dollar invested in Highway 1. I want to remind the member, and also his constituents, that it is the Liberal government that put \$100 million to widen Highway 1 to 264th Street out. That is where the dollars are flowing. They are helping not only the people of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, but Canadians in general.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his intervention today, but I will note that portions of Highway 1, both under Conservative and Liberal governments, have received significant investments. However, Highway 1 actually extends into Abbotsford, and the same people that the member and I represent are stuck in their trucks in traffic every day, because the investments have not gone far enough out of Vancouver to help the very people who need those investments today.

Let us work together and bring our MPs from Surrey and Abbotsford together and demand that the federal and provincial governments support Highway 1 to serve all Canadians in Surrey, Langley and Abbotsford. Let us work together.

• (1645)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in terms of infrastructure, I think we all recognize that there is a climate emergency before us. I sure hope that the government will invest in major infrastructure to address the climate emergency. An example would be to retrofit private and public institutions and buildings to ensure that we tackle the climate emergency together. I wonder whether this is something that the Conservative members would support.

Aside from that, I am also wondering about something Liberal members who spoke earlier said that they would be happy to support this motion if it were amended. I am curious to know whether any of the Liberal members, the cabinet minister, the parliamentary secretary or anybody at all has approached the Conservative members about an amendment to this motion so that we can move forward to ensure that accountability measures are in place to make sure that infrastructure programs and the spending of the money meet the targets and do what Canadians hope for us to do.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Speaker, I will say, as the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, that there is a need for climate-related infrastructure improvements both within new builds and in the natural infrastructure projects that the federal government should be supporting, such as flood mitigation programs along the Fraser River, which touch close to the member's riding and mine as well.

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**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will give the new member a break on this, and perhaps he could talk to one of the long-serving members in his caucus, because the infrastructure program and the accords we signed with the provinces were effectively rolled over from the Harper years, which were effectively rolled over from the Chrétien-Martin years, when the one-third, one-third, one-third formula was put in place. The one difference we made was that we give cities much more priority in setting the projects than provinces.

However, on the stretch of highway that the member referred to, if the provincial government nominates a city's request, we do not stand in the way of funding it. Therefore, the question he was asking would be better put in the B.C. legislature or perhaps in the city council chambers where his constituents will find their representation locally.

We do not set the priorities. We do not choose from the list. We do not edit the list. Cities nominate, provincial governments agree and we fund. When the provincial governments do not participate, the money stays in Ottawa, and that is not our fault, that is the provincial government's fault.

The good news in B.C. is that the Government of B.C. is actually one of the more aggressive provinces in spending infrastructure dollars, especially on climate change adaptation. I suggest the member write the minister a letter.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the frustration that mayors and councils in rural communities across my riding have with both the provincial and federal governments in getting the infrastructure dollars they need. I would refer to my earlier comments to the member for Surrey—Newton about working together. Members of Surrey, Abbotsford and Langley in this Parliament all want to see this highway constructed, and I understand that it is going to require the intervention from both the federal and provincial levels of government.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I would love to congratulate the hon. member for his recent election except for the fact that my husband was running against him. Despite that, I want to welcome the hon. member for Mission—Mat-squi—Fraser Canyon.

I fully support the issue the member raised in the House today of the sewer pipe under the Fraser River. It is old, it could leak, it could break, and it is worse than how he depicted it here today, although he did a great job.

I spoke with Mayor Pam Alexis of Mission about this project. They actually got \$11 million of funding, which was federal, provincial and municipal, but then they found out that it was going to be \$22 million, at which point all levels of government said, "Oh, too bad, so sad", and then the feds said, "Give us the money back."

I am sorry that I needed to take a little more time, but I urge all members in this place to work to ensure infrastructure funding for Mission to get the sewer pipe replaced.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Speaker, the sanitary pipeline project in Mission is unique in that there is a failure on the part of multiple levels

of government to see this project through. We need to get this done. It is a project of national interest, because if this sewage pipeline fails, salmon are going to die and then everyone in the province is going to be upset. There is a serious environmental risk here that needs to be addressed and I want to work with all members of the House of Commons because this is a project of national interest.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, please note that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with this motion for three reasons. The first is the delays in spending. Since 2016, only a small portion of the announced infrastructure spending has actually materialized.

The second reason is the transparency of economic data. The lack of specific figures distorts the calculations of the impact on GDP and employment.

Finally, the third reason is Quebec's share. Quebec wants its share, and the municipalities are waiting for their share in order to begin their projects.

In phase 1 of the Liberals' plan, from 2016 to 2018, Quebec got a raw deal, having received only 12% of the total investment, although its population represents 23%. By comparison, Ontario received more than 30%. That is outrageous.

As we know, federal participation in provincial or municipal infrastructure takes place through various programs and transfers. It is very complicated. The projects do not appear in the federal budget because they are not federal projects; all we see is the transfer program, with its criteria and allocated amounts. The projects themselves are instead under the capital initiatives of the Government of Quebec or of the municipalities. We do not have a clear picture of the projects being supported.

With respect to the proliferation of infrastructure transfers, there are rules and conditions attached to each of them. This ties Quebec's hands because it loses its ability to allocate funds according to its own priorities.

For that reason, the Bloc has been asking for years that the specific transfers be replaced by a lump-sum transfer: a single transfer with no federal conditions that Quebec can use according to its own priorities. The money must be freed up at some point.

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Following the tabling of Minister Girard's budget on March 21, 2019, several mayors, including the mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, and the mayor of Gatineau, Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, roundly condemned the fact that Quebec's commitments will not let them move forward with their public transit projects—the Quebec City tramway project and the Gatineau light rail project—even though the government said it supported them.

In reality, both have been taken hostage by the discussions between Quebec City and Ottawa, between two governments with different priorities.

As Ottawa increases the number of specific programs, each with strict eligibility criteria, federal requirements trigger a tug-of-war, which paralyzes the process no matter the government in power. In the end, this prevents Quebec priorities from being aligned with the priorities of municipalities.

What we want is a lump sum transfer. Simply put, projects will happen if Quebec wants them to and will not happen if Quebec does not. Why should that be up to Quebec rather than Ottawa?

I have a question: What proportion of Canada's public infrastructure is under federal jurisdiction? People might be surprised to learn that it is barely 2%. The provinces and municipalities are responsible for 98% of public infrastructure. The share of the funding amounts to just 5%. Ottawa is no expert on the subject, but it uses that tiny percentage to block everything and cause ridiculous delays.

In 2016, the Liberal government launched phase 1 of its infrastructure program. The Prime Minister planned to spend \$14.4 billion over two years but ended up spending just half that. The other half was never spent.

In 2018, the Liberal government decided to update its new infrastructure plan because the money was not flowing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said it was incomplete and did not address the questions and concerns he had raised. There is no clear indication of where the money is going now or in the future.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer reminds us that the government is talking about \$21 billion out of a total of \$91 billion over the years. That is not very much, and it means that three-quarters of the spending announced has not been explained or justified. Some may think I am joking, but that is the truth. It says so in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. Just because people are laughing does not mean this is funny.

Also according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, nearly one-quarter of the funding allocated for infrastructure since 2016 will lapse. That is no joke. That is money that we voted on that will never be spent.

How can Ottawa claim to understand and be able to prioritize the specific needs of Quebec's 1,400 municipalities and the 5,000 municipalities across Canada? That would be a lot to expect.

• (1655)

We must not forget the government's criterion for a rural community, namely that there must be 100,000 people in a municipality. In my riding, there are 23 municipalities, including an indigenous

community, and not one has a population of 100,000. This shows just how out of touch Ottawa is. I have said it before and will say it again, the only way to address this is to have an automatic single payment. That is what the Bloc is asking for. It would let Quebec and the municipalities decide for themselves which project best meets their needs. They are accountable to the people closest to them. Otherwise, the paralysis will continue.

I will illustrate my point with the example of access to high-speed Internet in the regions. We know that it is extremely important. There was a program to that effect. However, the targets were poor and the program did not meet its objectives. The first phase of the connect to innovate program had several setbacks, including the slow pace of the federal analyses that had to be completed before the funding to actually connect people could be released. The announcements made in 2017 for some regions have yet to get people an Internet connection. This is not a joke. What is the federal government doing? It developed a program that does not meet Quebec's needs and takes forever to release funding for the projects, with no guarantee that the projects will actually reduce the cost of Internet services in the regions. The federal government should encourage development, not be an obstacle to it. That is not what is happening, as we can see here in the House this afternoon.

I will use my riding to give a concrete example. In the north of my riding is the RCM of Matawinie, which is also represented in part by my esteemed colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé. This RCM decided to take matters into its own hands and launched a \$55-million project. The federal government was so slow that Quebec had to release the money. There is still hope that the federal government will cover part of the funding. After all, half of the taxes we pay go to the federal government. To date, the feds have not paid a single cent for Internet in Matawinie. That is unacceptable. This must change, and a block transfer is what we need.

Ottawa needs to stop holding taxpayers' money hostage. Sometimes it seems that all the government wants is the biggest flag and top billing on the infrastructure billboard, instead of true development. Ottawa needs to respect the expertise of local decision-makers and forward the funding, without conditions, to those who will know how to use it. This is why the Bloc Québécois supports this motion.

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In closing, I would like to point out one very important thing that Ottawa must respect: municipal bylaws. Constitutionally, Quebec's territory belongs to Quebecers. The way in which it is occupied, used, developed and protected is essentially governed by Quebec laws and municipal bylaws. There are, however, a number of activities that are not covered by our laws. These involve wharves, ports, airports, telecommunications infrastructure, and all federal property and interprovincial pipelines. Essentially, when a project is considered to be under federal jurisdiction, it is above the laws that we pass in our municipalities and in Quebec City. Harmonious land use can only be achieved at the local level, by the people who live there. That is why we are going to introduce a bill to fix this aberration, in the same spirit as the bill proposed by my colleague from Repentigny in the previous Parliament.

Let me give an example that will perfectly illustrate this. Most municipalities have had problems with cell towers being put up just about anywhere. I am thinking of Rogers' current plans to put up a tower in Saint-Charles-Borromée, near Joliette. In this area, telecommunications companies are above our laws, above the will of the people. Some cities have tried to pass bylaws to straighten things out, but the courts have struck them down one after the other. Orders are coming down from the top, from the feds, although the opposite would be much more effective. It has to change, and as I said, we will come back to that.

• (1700)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I can comment specifically on the province of Manitoba, but I think we could apply it universally to the different provinces and territories. We often see an unbelievable listing of potential capital investment infrastructure projects that cities or municipalities will develop. They are very much aware of the streets that need to be repaired, potholes and so forth, and they will spend a great deal of money fixing them. At times, provinces will say they will provide additional money for specific projects and will try to establish priorities for particular municipalities. Then at times, a national government with a national perspective will say what it is prepared to do, particularly in terms of matching funds, to provide incentives for not just one area of the country but every region.

Would the member not agree that at times there is a need for the national government to provide those incentives for Canadian priorities?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his comments.

I strongly encourage him to convince his government to do just that. As he said himself, it is people in the municipalities, on the ground, who know where the needs are.

I disagreed with one part of his comments, specifically when he talked about the national government. For us, the national government is in Quebec City, since the House has recognized Quebec as a nation. Here, we talk about the federal government.

The federal government must contribute. Money must be transferred in a lump sum. Think of the gas tax model. Before so many conditions were added, the money was transferred on a per capita basis. That allowed local authorities to work with known amounts, to know what to expect and spend the money quickly on the ground, and not only in large urban centres.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his support for today's motion.

He recognizes the importance of the motion, or the importance of transparency, as it were. To invest in the provinces and municipalities, it is important to know what the plan is and where the money is coming from.

Since we agree on the motion, I want to talk about something else that bothers me quite a bit. When I was a mayor, there was many a time when I had to wait for the federal government's final approval on projects.

Let me explain because people need to understand how this works. Indeed, the provincial government negotiates an agreement with the federal government. Then, the provincial government comes to an agreement with the municipalities and negotiates a joint approval of the projects. Then the list of projects is sent to the federal government. However, if a project does not align with the federal government's priorities it may be that its approval takes longer. That is the reality on the ground, and the municipalities and provinces are not happy about it. Final approval can be somewhat political.

That is why we are asking the Auditor General to get involved. Does the hon. member agree with how I see things?

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. Ottawa must stop creating obstacles, free up the money and do it fast.

That is not what we are seeing here. During the first phase, just half of the money approved was spent for the reason mentioned. Under the Conservatives, it took two and a half years to develop a framework agreement, and then nearly a year and a half before each project was approved.

This money needs to be made available. The government needs to transfer the money holus-bolus, on a per capita basis, similar to how the gas tax is transferred, but without the conditions. This would help the smaller communities, like the ones that my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable and I represent.

**Mr. René Arseneault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Official Languages), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was listening to what my two colleagues were saying, and I completely disagree, especially with the comments made by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable who claims to have been a mayor. All of the mayors in my riding and all of the mayors listening this evening would say the exact opposite of what he said. All he needs to do is ask them.

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Bilateral agreements were signed with the provinces. Our province, like all of the others, submits its priorities to the federal government, which has not happened. The municipalities are well aware of how infrastructure spending works. More specifically, what is happening is that some provinces do not submit any projects. That is the problem. All of the municipalities in my riding know this, contrary to what my colleagues claim.

• (1705)

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Mr. Speaker, the federal government owns 2% of infrastructure in Canada and funds only 5%.

It sees itself as being at a higher level and feels it must take its time to approve everything and to put its big signs everywhere. All we are saying is that this causes delays. The consensus among the mayors of my riding and everywhere else in Quebec is that they want a lump-sum transfer, and they want it fast. They want projects to get off the ground.

We have the numbers. The Parliamentary Budget Officer showed that half the money has not been spent. That is unacceptable and it must change. I do not know what the mayors in the riding of my esteemed colleague, and great musician, believe, but what we want is for the money to flow.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since I have not yet had the chance to do so, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for the trust they placed in me and the honour they bestowed upon me by electing me to represent them. I would like to assure them that I am here for them, to meet their expectations and contribute to their well-being. I will fight for the issues affecting the riding tooth and nail.

I would like to thank my family, my husband, my four grown children, whose homes stretch from Val-d'Or to Edmonton, my grandson and the other grandchild who will be born in March, as well as my friends who support me in this new chapter of my life.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the exceptional work of the volunteers who supported me during the election campaign.

The motion we are debating today is very important. In a 2018 report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer indicated that the budget provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7-billion infrastructure spending plan. The Parliamentary Budget Officer requested the new plan, but it does not exist, and that is a problem.

We really need to shed some light on this and find out what is really happening. I completely agree that the House should adopt this motion and call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government's investing in Canada plan, including, but not limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises.

I look forward to reading the Auditor General's report a year from now. We already know that there has been a delay in spending. Of the \$14.4 billion set out in phase 1 of the new infrastructure plan, only half has been allocated to projects for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fiscal years.

In his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the manna promised by the Liberals is slow to leave the coffers and get to the work sites. The Liberal government promised to invest \$186.7 billion in infrastructure over 12 years, but about one-quarter of the amounts allocated for 2016 to 2019 were carried over to future years.

Quebec wants its share, and the municipalities are waiting to develop their projects, despite their many pressing infrastructure needs. In my region, for example, in Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, we need more roads, more rail lines, infrastructure, telecommunications and airport improvements, just to name a few. Improving both freight and passenger rail travel will be crucial. Shipping freight by truck is ruining our roads.

We also need to make the transportation of dangerous goods safer, especially oil. During the campaign, I met the mayors of Val-d'Or, Senneterre, Chapais, Chibougamau, Lebel-sur-Quévillon and Matagami. They all mentioned the importance of rail transportation, which has been ignored by the federal government for the past 25 years.

We have another problem back home: housing. The large-scale mining sector in the riding is causing a housing shortage. The vacancy rate is becoming quite low, which is causing housing prices to go up. Property owners are taking advantage of the situation to raise the rent. Some students have even decided to study elsewhere because it is too hard to find housing and it is too expensive. The regions are emptying out. The solution would be to build new housing, but for that we need the necessary infrastructure. Municipalities would need to build and improve the water and sewer system to support such development. That takes money.

What is more, telecommunications are a boon on an economic, cultural and social level. Access to the Internet is essential. For example, a nurse died before the holidays in the Matagami area. He was heading to work in northern Quebec when he got into a car accident. He had to walk and was found frozen to death. If his cellphone had received a signal, he would still be alive today.

According to the Auditor General's report, there is also a problem of transparency with some of the economic data. The lack of exact figures skews the calculation of the impact on GDP and employment.

Large-scale infrastructure programs are used to stimulate the economy and create jobs.

• (1710)

If the numbers provided reflect reality only partially or not at all, it is difficult to assess the impact.

Mining companies that fly their skilled workers back and forth every day during the winter and at night are not happy about putting fathers and mothers at risk. I would sure like Nav Canada to ask the Crees of Quebec who use the Abitibi and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean airports if they are okay with Nav Canada cutting a service that is essential to their safety.

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The Parliamentary Budget Officer condemned the lack of information relating to transparency and good governance, but he went even further by pointing out that delays in planned infrastructure spending can have important implications for the budgetary balance and the strength of the economy.

Quebec wants its fair share, and municipalities are waiting to get their projects off the ground. Interestingly, Quebec is one of the provinces that gets the least per capita funding, with an average of just \$143 per person. The national average is \$703 per person. That is unacceptable. What is behind this injustice?

With so many different infrastructure transfers, each with its own rules and conditions, Quebec is powerless to allocate funding based on its own priorities.

That is why the Bloc has been asking for years that the specific transfer be replaced with a lump sum transfer. As we often say, there must be a lump sum transfer, a single transfer with no federal conditions so Quebec can allocate it based on its own priorities. The provinces know their priorities better than the federal government. That makes sense. How can Canada claim to know and prioritize the specific needs of 1,400 Quebec municipalities?

I am the Bloc Québécois critic for indigenous affairs. I would like to mention that it is important that we work with all first nations and listen to them, nation to nation.

In closing, I will say that I support the motion we are debating today and that I will be voting in favour of it. We must determine whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises.

[*English*]

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges we had in the first term was that when we put infrastructure dollars on the table, when we put infrastructure dollars at the front door of provincial parliaments, out the back door provincial cuts undermined the program. In particular, in Alberta, we had a significant problem with this, where we did not bind the government into spending levels with conditions. What we had was a government that simply used federal money to fund provincial programs and did not add to the mix. We are trying to increase infrastructure spending, not simply change who is funding it.

If the Auditor General comes back with a report saying that we have to bind provincial spending levels in order to have impact, would the member not agree that is a reasonable request, without setting priorities from the province of Quebec, to ensure we do not lose provincial dollars while we put federal dollars on the table so municipalities get the benefit of both programs instead of just one or the other?

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Speaker, we are aware of everything that our colleague mentioned. The clock is ticking, but unfortunately, nothing is happening. When I talk about working together, I am referring to working with indigenous groups, but we could also talk about the parties working together. That is the solution.

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I think two things are clear: We support the motion, and we are calling for a lump sum transfer.

We could point out the problems with such a program using many examples from each of our ridings. Thérèse-De Blainville has a funding request that goes way back, as I saw first-hand during the recent election campaign. The federal government announced amounts on its own, without the participation of the provincial government, even though the province is responsible for infrastructure. We cannot operate like this anymore. Things need to be done differently when it comes to the amounts allocated, priorities and projects. Infrastructure falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and municipalities. The federal government needs to transfer the money. We would be much more efficient.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks, which I support. We are proud of the work that we are doing for Quebec, the municipalities and all the issues that concern us.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou on her election to the House.

Quebec is admired for its cultural expertise and historical value. One of the issues in my community is infrastructure in the cultural sector. We would love for the federal government to invest in the cultural sector to feed our souls and support our communities in that effort.

Could the member comment on the federal government's infrastructure vis-à-vis the importance of cultural components and whether that should be supported as well?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Yes, arts and culture are very important. They are two similar but distinct things, and we must work toward this. I support what my colleague said.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for her excellent speech.

She pointed out that she is the Bloc Québécois critic for first nations. She also said that it is the same story for first nations infrastructure: money is voted but not released.

In her opinion, what should the government do to release the funds for first nations, which have so many needs?

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As far as indigenous affairs are concerned, the key issues are social housing, homelessness and infrastructure in northern Quebec. The melting snow is also important for them because it changes their culture. When it comes to the environment, we have to work with first nations.

[English]

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with our fantastic member for Langley—Aldergrove. I certainly look forward to his comments.

I wish I was starting this speech on a better note. It is a very sad time in the world. Of course, this week we lost a great in the sports industry, Kobe Bryant, and his daughter, and the world mourns this.

Upon reflection of this, I got to thinking about the sports world and this speech ahead of me in the House of Commons. I began to reflect on one of my favourite sports movies, indeed, one of my favourite movies. It is a movie from my earlier times called *Jerry Maguire*.

I like this movie very much. It is about an individual who is a sports agent. He makes the decision to leave his big firm to start his own firm because he is concerned about the ethics at the big firm. Unfortunately, he only gets one client, and members may know this client. It is the character played by Cuba Gooding Jr., a very gregarious and bold character. There is one line that he is known for, and this comes to mind as we discuss this opposition day motion, “Show me the money.”

Certainly, Canadians have given their money in record deficits. The federal debt as of 2017-18 budget was \$671.3 billion, not a small amount. I wish I could say that it stopped there, but unfortunately in 2018-19 it went up to \$696.5 billion.

The federal deficit in the 2019-20 budget is expected to be \$19.8 billion, as noted not by the Fraser Institute but by Maclean's. Those are huge numbers. As a result of that, what do we expect of the government from taking all of these taxes? We expect it to show us the money.

Let us first give some consideration to where the money is not. I think that is pretty evident by the PBO in its findings.

In 2017, the Parliamentary Budget Officer found that the Liberals had spent only half of the promised infrastructure money. In 2018, when the Parliamentary Budget Officer requested the Liberals' infrastructure plan, it found that in fact the plan did not exist. In 2019, when the Parliamentary Budget Officer requested a list of all specific project commitments under the investing in Canada plan, the Liberal government was unable to provide the data. It is a \$186.7-billion plan and the government cannot show us the money. I think Canadians are asking for that. They want the government to show us the money.

The PBO has shown that the Liberals have failed even to get their own infrastructure money out the door and that infrastructure money lapses at 60% per year for the first two years, which is terrible. When the former minister of infrastructure was asked in the

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House of Commons how he was spending \$187 billion on infrastructure, he said that he had bought a few buses.

The Liberals claim that their infrastructure spending would increase GDP by an average of 0.3% per year. In fact, at best, the PBO estimated that it fell short by 67%.

The truth is that nobody even knows how much the government spends on infrastructure. The Prime Minister does not even know. The Parliamentary Budget Officer does not know. The Department of Finance does not know. Even the Department of Infrastructure does not know.

Our offices asked the PBO to reach out to the Department of Infrastructure and ask how much the government spent on infrastructure. Even the department could not answer the question.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the government's infrastructure plan did not exist, thus proving that the investing in Canada plan is hopelessly mismanaged and improvised and, therefore, the reason and the need for this motion today.

● (1720)

The PBO analysis shows that despite all of the Prime Minister's spending, there was no incremental increase in infrastructure in Canada. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 40% of the Prime Minister's infrastructure spending lapsed both in 2017 and 2018. This is promised money that never flowed out the door. The PBO estimated that 40% of the funding allocated for infrastructure from 2016-17 to 2018-19 will lapse unused. That is why I am asking today, on behalf of Canadians, for the government to show us the money.

Statistics Canada's infrastructure economic account shows almost no increase in infrastructure spending. However, between 2015 and 2018, the most recent years available, annual inflation-adjusted infrastructure investment went from \$70.7 billion to \$71.5 billion. There was only a tiny \$0.8-billion annual increase in infrastructure, despite a staggering \$35 billion in infrastructure spending allocated by the Prime Minister over all these years. Again I ask the government to show me the money.

I thought that perhaps, if we are not seeing it in these grand offices of Parliament and the Government of Canada, I could look closer, in my own backyard, to see some evidence of spending. Unfortunately, I cannot see the money there either. I looked, for example, at a \$4.4-billion pipeline, which my province is desperately in need of at this time. I understand there were some shovels in the ground as of December, but if we look ahead to the future, far into the future frankly, Q2 or Q3 of 2022 is the best-case scenario completion date. That is three years. That is another three years lost in Alberta. Again I ask the government to show me the money.

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Let me look harder in my backyard. Let me look to a project that is very dear to all Calgarians: the Green Line. After many years of hemming and hawing and toing and froing, we finally get a commitment from the federal government. However, when is this implementation expected to be completed? It will be in 2026. I will be over 50. Hopefully my son will have a learner's permit by then. Again I ask the government to show me the money.

I can say there are two places where we can see the money. The first is in the cost of the administration of the infrastructure bank. There is nothing built, but there is some money there. In 2019, there was \$11.376 million, which includes staff compensation, professional fees and travel, but not a single infrastructure project. Someone please call the member for New Brunswick Southwest and get the waste report going again, because we see the money is there, but there is no infrastructure.

There is another place we are seeing the money, but unfortunately it is not in Canada. It is in Asia with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. With a \$256-million contribution over five years, we are actually 1% shareholders, which is pretty impressive. There are three pipelines there. There are none here, but three there. Also, as my colleague from the lovely riding of Calgary Shepard indicated today, this money is moving from gift to investment, so we are not even being transparent about how we are recording it, much less how we are spending. I do not even want to talk about the belt and road initiative around the world that we are contributing to as a result of these investments.

The government has continued to be a tax and spend—oh, I cannot even say “spend”, because we have not spent the money. I wish it were at least a tax-and-spend government, but it is just a taxing government. It continues to take our money through taxes, debt and deficits, as I indicated at the beginning of my speech.

• (1725)

In the end, on behalf of Calgarians, Albertans, the good people of Calgary Midnapore and Canadians, I would ask the government to show me the money.

• (1730)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to show the member the money, but I would need her to explain why the provincial government in Alberta just cut the Calgary transit budget by 86%.

The green line project, which we approved and were prepared to spend money on, has suddenly disappeared as a project because of a cut from \$550 million by the province to \$75 million. Without the provincial contribution, matching federal dollars will not flow.

I could also show the member opposite a \$200-million investment that the previous government made before Kenney came to office. He has cut \$200 million, and now the LRTs will not be rebuilt. Federal dollars were going to match the provincial dollars there, but because Kenney has spent the infrastructure budget, now the federal dollars will not flow.

The hard part about our infrastructure program is that we do not spend the money unless there is a real project. We do not send mon-

ey to Alberta hoping that it may someday decide to build transit projects. When they start to be constructed, the federal government will cash out the receipts as they are submitted. That is part of the reason why the money remains in Ottawa until such time as a city spends it.

Fundamentally, if the Conservatives in Alberta are worried about unemployment and worried about construction trade workers getting jobs, they destroyed the green line project by cutting 86% of the provincial funding, which eliminated the federal contribution to a project we had already approved and were ready to build. It is pretty hard to show the Conservatives the money because they do not want to spend it.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Madam Speaker, first of all I will say that I actually think the member was right that it was not Kenney's announcement originally. It was actually an announcement by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. I thank her very much, in her portfolio of western diversification, for doing that.

It is very rich that the parliamentary secretary is standing there lecturing me on that when he was actually just in my city, two or three weeks ago, announcing 200 spaces for housing. Do members know why we need those 200 spaces for housing? It is because the parliamentary secretary's government has destroyed the economy there. It has destroyed the economy.

Thanks for the 200 spaces, but why does the government not do something significant to bring back the economy in Alberta?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. With respect to transparency and efficiency, my Bloc Québécois colleagues have clearly demonstrated that the provinces, especially Quebec, are best equipped to know their people's needs.

The Conservatives have already had a chance to vote against a Bloc Québécois motion. That motion called for the government to respect provincial jurisdiction, in particular by not authorizing any project that does not comply with provincial and Quebec laws relating to environmental protection and land use planning. It is a question of efficiency and knowledge.

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**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Madam Speaker, Alberta and Quebec naturally have different policies and priorities. I can say that we agree that provinces should have more responsibility. We are prepared to accept more responsibility to better manage issues and projects. I imagine that is why the Bloc will support this motion. I hope so.

I will think about how we can work together. I think that includes the idea that both Alberta and Quebec want more responsibility over things that affect our money and our projects. I think that is why we are here having this conversation. I hope we will have the support of the Bloc for this motion.

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I was hoping, as the member for Calgary Midnapore began, that I could open by saying that she had me at hello. However, I am afraid the “show me the money” piece lost me on the pipeline question.

The member mentioned that \$4.5 billion had been spent on a pipeline that was not built. Just to clarify, for all members, the government spent \$4.5 billion on an existing 65-year-old pipeline. It did not create a single additional job. The members opposite, including the member for Calgary Midnapore, obviously want us to proceed with the completely irresponsible notion that we would spend \$10 billion to \$13 billion more of public money to build something that has no market, which is why Kinder Morgan left.

I would urge the member to reconsider. There are many more ways we could spend that money, including restoring the abandoned oil wells, converting them to geothermal, and doing things that would really help the economy of Alberta.

• (1735)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Madam Speaker, I continue to believe that Alberta and Canada have the most ethical, clean processes for providing the nation and the world with the energy we so need.

With that, I appreciate having the member's hello, but I will leave her a goodbye.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of the motion.

In 2015 the Liberal Party ran on a platform of increasing infrastructure spending, and together with that there was going to be a series of small to medium-sized deficits. The objective was to implement infrastructure spending and projects that would improve efficiency and economic productivity and ultimately strengthen Canada's economy and create well-paying jobs. There were going to be three years of small to medium-sized deficits, and in year four, 2019, the Liberals were going to balance the budget. It seemed like a plausible story, and the Liberal Party won a majority government.

However, fast-forward to 2020. Rather than looking in the mirror that Canadian voters have given them to perhaps examine their pre-suppositions, the Liberals are saying they do not care about balanced budgets anymore. In fact, they are saying yes, we did not meet our objective of balancing the budget in year four, 2019; we have just moved the goalposts. They say they do not measure

deficits in real dollars anymore; they now measure deficits as a ratio to gross domestic product. Under that new measure, they say they are looking way better.

As a matter of fact, the truth to the story is they are not looking better. They just do not look as bad as some of our trading partners.

I wonder what would happen today if there were a global financial crisis of the kind we had in 2008. Canada, unfortunately, is not in the good, safe, sound position that it was in at that time under the then-Conservative government. Canada weathered the global financial crisis very well because of the sound economic policy that was the core of the Conservative government. If the government cannot balance its budget in times of full employment with many people paying taxes in an environment of good tax revenue and low interest rates, then it is no wonder that many Canadians are concerned and worried about the future of this country.

If this debt financing actually went for the stated purpose of increasing and improving infrastructure spending, it would not be so bad, but the government has mishandled the infrastructure file and there is a lack of transparency, so we are looking for more transparency. That is why I speak in favour of the motion:

That...the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government's Investing in Canada Plan, including, but not be limited to, verifying whether the plan lives up to its stated goals and promises....

I am convinced that the Auditor General, when he reports, will say that the government has not.

I have heard members from the other side say that they are having trouble spending the money because of lack of co-operation from provincial governments and municipal mayors. I can say that there are a couple of projects in the Fraser Valley for which people there would love to have a commitment from the federal government.

I have spoken with the mayors in my riding in Langley, but my riding also extends into west Abbotsford, so I have spoken to the mayor of Abbotsford as well. They are fully in support of expanding Highway 1. I thank my neighbouring member of Parliament for speaking in favour of that great project. Many people are tied up in traffic every day and every morning there is a long lineup of people going into metro Vancouver, so it is high time for Highway 1 to be expanded.

It was pointed out by the member for Surrey—Newton that Conservative and Liberal governments have supported the expansion of Highway 1 as far as exit 264, but that only tells half the answer. That is now where the bottleneck is going to be. Highway 1, the Trans-Canada Highway, was built in the mid-1960s, and beyond exit 264 there has never been any expansion. It is still a two-way highway, a core transit corridor, and it is high time for it to be expanded.

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• (1740)

I also want to talk about the SkyTrain expansion. The western part of my riding is in metro Vancouver, and all 21 mayors there are fully in support of the SkyTrain expansion. There is a funding commitment from three levels of government to bring the SkyTrain to the Fleetwood area in Surrey, but we are looking for another \$1.6 billion to complete the project and bring it all the way to Langley. I would point out that \$1.6 billion is less than 1% of the total \$186.7 billion that has been committed to infrastructure spending. This is one project with full support from all the mayors of metro Vancouver and the members of the legislative assembly as well, both Liberal and NDP.

There are a couple of projects that have full support from my constituents, the mayors and the members of the legislative assembly. Those are shovel-ready. We are looking for the federal government to come forward and support those two projects.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, Langley is a beautiful city, and I will read a headline from its wonderful news service, the Langley Advance Times, from October 16, 2016, on the result of our infrastructure program. The headline is very clear about exactly where dollars have been lent: “Langley City among first B.C. municipalities to benefit from federal infrastructure grant.” In fact, it was the largest grant in B.C. in 15 years. The difference between B.C. and Alberta is that B.C. has a provincial government that wants to partner with municipalities and the federal government to deliver real results. In Alberta the provincial government wants to cut, cut.

Could the member opposite explain to me the Conservative proposition that we can build SkyTrains, highways or water sewage plants with tax cuts? I was a municipal councillor for 10 years and never saw a single piece of infrastructure built with a tax cut. It is built with investment.

I know I am not going to get thanks for the investment in Langley, although we heard that from the previous MP, but I will say that the largest investment ever made in Langley by a federal infrastructure program was made by this government under this program.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta:** Madam Speaker, I will take this opportunity to thank the Liberal government for that investment. It was very much appreciated, and I will give credit where credit is due.

However, we are looking for an expansion of the SkyTrain and we are ready for it. I understand the mayors are going to be in Ottawa next week talking to the government. It has my support and the support of the MLAs as well, both NDP and Liberal. Make it happen.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is important to speak to the Government of Canada's commitment to building strong, vibrant communities that will benefit Canadians for generations. Our government understands the need to build sustainable communities that bring Canadians together and ensure they have access to services, programs and cultural and social opportunities where they live and work. That is what we

heard from Canadians across the country. We heard it from indigenous partners, as well as from municipal, provincial and territorial leaders.

• (1745)

[English]

They told us that they needed strong, safe, livable and prosperous communities in order to be successful. That is why our historic, long-term investing in Canada plan is based on three key objectives: creating long-term economic growth for communities across Canada, supporting a low-carbon, green economy and building inclusive communities for all Canadians.

[Translation]

To do this, we are investing more than \$180 billion over 12 years in five main infrastructure priorities: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation infrastructure, and rural and northern communities infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

These priorities are broader than one department alone. The plan is being delivered by 14 different federal departments and agencies, including Infrastructure Canada. Infrastructure Canada manages the investing in Canada infrastructure program, which is providing funding through bilateral agreements between the department and each of the provinces and territories.

This federal investment includes four funding streams: \$20.1 billion for public transit; \$9.2 billion for green infrastructure; \$1.3 billion for community, culture and recreational infrastructure; and \$2.4 billion for wide-ranging infrastructure needs in rural and northern communities.

Today, I would like to talk about the importance of and investments being made in Canada's community, culture and recreational infrastructure. Building infrastructure to meet Canadians' needs where they live, work, play and raise their families takes the collaboration of provinces, territories, municipalities and partners such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Canada is made up of communities of all sizes, and our government recognizes that the success of our country as a whole depends on building safe, attractive and inclusive places that Canadians can call home. All of these investments have economic benefits.

However, the social benefits cannot be understated. When we build inclusive community centres, we encourage Canadians of all ages and abilities to come together, learn about each other, engage with each other, and get involved in physical activities that will help them increase their quality of life.

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There are investments such as the \$6 million for the new Ben Calf Robe School in Alberta, which will enhance the ability of indigenous communities to teach, promote and preserve their cultural heritage within Canada without having to leave their home communities; or the \$16.1 million investment in six new cultural and recreation facilities for members of the Tsawwassen First Nation and surrounding communities in British Columbia. These funds will go to renovations and retrofit for an arena in Colwood, an indigenous cultural centre in Lake Country, a new field house for the sportplex in north Cowichan, a new community building in Williams Lake and a new culturally specialized multi-purpose community and recreation facility for residents and visitors to the Sumas First Nation to enjoy.

These facilities help bring people together to take advantage of a wide variety of community services and programs. However, more than that, for many first nation communities, they help to foster cultural awareness, protect traditions, break isolation and allow more families to stay and grow in their communities.

- (1750)

*[Translation]*

When we work together with provinces, territories, municipalities and communities to build safe, new affordable housing and new sports facilities, what we are really doing is building the Canada of the future, one community at a time.

*[English]*

The investing in Canada plan was designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of Canadians. I am pleased to report that through the plan our government has invested over \$57.5 billion in more than 52,000 projects in municipalities of all sizes. Almost all of these projects are currently under way or completed.

Nowadays, the problems our communities are facing are not the same as they were 50 or even 20 years ago. Programs like the smart cities challenge aim to get behind big ideas that solve community problems. By using data and connected technologies, we can solve the issues communities are currently facing as well as the challenges of the future, and that is in addition to the reliable, predictable funding provided by the federal gas tax fund.

The gas tax fund provides more than \$2 billion per year and benefits all municipalities across the country. This federal funding, which supports approximately 4,000 projects each year, flows from the provinces and territories directly to the municipalities, which are responsible for planning, identifying and implementing projects under the 18 categories of eligible funding.

*[Translation]*

Budget 2019 also included a one-time increase of \$2.2 billion to the federal gas tax fund, which doubled the government's commitment to municipalities in 2018-19, enabling municipalities to invest more in the infrastructure projects that are necessary to their communities and the well-being of their residents. What this means is that more communities across the country will be able to make infrastructure investment decisions that are right for them.

*[English]*

They will be able to put funds toward the much needed sports arenas, cultural centres and natural green spaces their residents need, want and deserve.

In turn, these investments will strengthen communities, support their social and economic growth, and build a stronger future for all Canadians. They will also help strengthen communities during times of climate crisis.

*[Translation]*

The costs and impacts of climate change are significant and increasing. We also know that the social and economic costs of building resilient infrastructure that will protect communities from disaster are less than disaster recovery costs.

Catastrophic events are becoming more frequent here at home and around the world, so we have to start thinking about how we can use our resources more effectively to protect our communities. By focusing on infrastructure that is cleaner, more efficient, and better able to withstand the effects of time and climate change, we are building a healthy, prosperous and sustainable country for our children and grandchildren.

*[English]*

To achieve this, we are working closely with our partners, including the provinces, territories and municipalities that own approximately 98% of all core public infrastructure.

*[Translation]*

By working with partners at all levels of government, with indigenous leaders and with stakeholders, we are building communities that Canadians are proud to live in. We can achieve this by showing respect for taxpayer money and by protecting our environment now, so that it can be enjoyed by future generations.

*[English]*

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member certainly told us about some great projects. In my riding, it has not been as positive. There is an arena in Orono, Ontario, that desperately needs repair. There is a waste treatment facility in Brighton that also needs help. There are lots of projects that need help. I would love to have the member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle come to my community so I can show her some of the projects that need her help.

When I think of having the Auditor General in town to do a review, I do not see any negatives coming from it. At best, they may have some ideas to help the government get the money out quicker. The Auditor General may come back and say everything is great. We really have not lost anything and we could benefit tremendously from it.

I ask the member this: Will the Liberals vote for our motion?

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● (1755)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Northumberland—Peterborough South for sharing a little about his riding.

We are committed to transparency, so if the Auditor General would like to conduct an audit concerning this matter, he is welcome to do so. That is why the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure proposed an amendment that simply replaced the misleading preamble of this motion and left the main body intact.

It is open to the Auditor General to come in, if he wishes to do so, and perform an audit to verify whether everything is in order.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her fine words.

She made a number of interesting points, and the list of the various projects was very informative. However, some points did not go over as well, especially with respect to the 18 categories of eligible funding and the work with municipalities.

I agree that everything needs to be structured. However, infrastructure remains a Quebec jurisdiction. We are calling on the federal government to provide the money without conditions. To me, “eligible category” sounds like “condition”. When she talked about working with municipalities, I took it to mean that she was bypassing the Government of Quebec.

Could my colleague explain and give us some reassurance?

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Our government is working closely with our partners, including the provinces. The territories and municipalities are responsible for roughly 98% of public infrastructure. I will give an example. Funding for public transit takes into account the population to be served and ridership. This has already been established between the federal government and the provincial governments, including Quebec. We will continue to work with the provinces and that is what will happen.

I hope our colleagues understand that it is very important to have infrastructure and for all of us to work together.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, with respect to the infrastructure issue and the motion before us today, it is important to have accountability, so the NDP will support the motion.

With respect to infrastructure programming, it is very difficult for smaller communities and municipalities to come up with that one-third funding. To that end, I wonder whether the government has contemplated adjustments to that infrastructure requirement.

As well, in terms of soft infrastructure, one of the key issues for my community in Vancouver East, which I am very proud of, is that we have the largest number of artists per capita in the country. We are in need of great infrastructure in the cultural and artistic com-

munity. In particular, we are losing studios at such a rapid rate that many of the independents—

● (1800)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** We need to get to the answer please from the hon. member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Madam Speaker, cultural centres and community centres are important so that people can get together and bond and share and be there for each other in times of need.

I mentioned, in a very detailed way, very concretely, what projects are in place. If Canadians want further information, they can go on the Infrastructure website and see what projects have already taken place and the ones that are going to come along in the future.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to put things into perspective. The City of Winnipeg recently released an infrastructure program that has established priorities, and I believe somewhere in the neighbourhood of 45 priorities were established. When we take a look at the cost of those 45 projects, it is well over \$5.5 billion. That is just 45 projects. If one reads through the projects, one would see that they do not include many of the community streets and neighbourhoods that I represent, or that other members of Parliament represent throughout the city of Winnipeg. It is virtually an endless pit when it comes to just how much money we could be spending on fixing roads, back lanes, community structures and so forth.

If one wants to get a sense of it, one can take a look at this. The city of Winnipeg is not the only community that publishes documents that illustrate how the spending of infrastructure dollars is prioritized. Winnipeg is one of many cities in Canada, with a population of 700,000. One can only imagine the demands for infrastructure in all regions of our country, whether urban or rural.

When I was in opposition a number of years ago, I challenged the Harper government to seriously look at investing nationally in infrastructure. I pointed out the types of deficits of infrastructure in the city of Winnipeg. I believe that back then I even underestimated it. This is nothing new. It has been happening now for many years. The difference is that back in 2015 there was one political party that was campaigning saying that it wanted to invest in Canada. Liberals wanted to invest in Canada’s infrastructure. This is something that urban and rural municipalities and many different stakeholders wanted to hear. For so many years, the Harper government was starving the investments in infrastructure and adding to the infrastructure deficit.

When Liberals took the reins of government back in 2015, no one in Canada was surprised that we came out with a record number of commitments toward building Canada's infrastructure. This was virtually universally applied in all the different regions of our country. Back then, there were Conservatives and New Democrats who were more focused on balancing the budget, not realizing that investing in infrastructure builds the economy, and that building the economy helps the larger picture, including revenue coming back to the government. We are the only party that was committed to really investing in infrastructure.

The motion brought forward by the official opposition makes reference to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I have often made reference to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In the Liberal caucus, we have a deep respect for the office, and we have consistently had that respect, contrary to the official opposition.

On March 15, the PBO posted, "Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the Government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan." That was part of the concern. Let us take a look at the motion. What opposition members are doing is trying to mislead Canadians through motions like this one. They do not make reference to the fact that the Parliamentary Budget Officer met with the different departments after it was explained to the departments that we needed to be able to provide additional information. In August, another report was released, which opposition members do not make reference to.

• (1805)

The report stated that the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the original report showed we were delivering exactly what we said we would. The Parliamentary Budget Office was doing its job, as it should, and we were doing our job, as we should. When we told Canadians that we were prepared to commit to infrastructure dollars, we did that.

I listened to the debate, and it has been relatively interesting. Many members on the opposition benches have been saying that more money should be spent on infrastructure. They cite projects. The opposition has come a long way. Now it seems that the members, if not directly are indirectly supporting what we promised to do in 2015. We are now delivering on that. Now they are on side with the fact that we should be investing in Canada's infrastructure.

The members talk a lot about the process. I would like to go over the process a little.

I pointed out the City of Winnipeg plan. It is in a great position, from a local perspective. When people complain about potholes, or streets or community facilities, they contact the city. The city has a limited tax base, through property tax and a few other sources, to generate revenue. If it were left up to the city or the municipal governments, that overall infrastructure deficit would continue to grow. Provincial governments of all political stripes have recognized that, and so has the national government.

In the last four or five years, we have seen a national government that truly cares about the infrastructure. We have actually done two things. Not only have we allocated record amounts of money for infrastructure, but looking at the last budget we presented, we doubled down on the gas tax for that budget year. That meant tens of

### *Business of Supply*

millions of more dollars for the City of Winnipeg to do some of the more common things, such as fixing potholes or identifying some streets in Winnipeg North and other ridings that needed a little more attention. We have been dependent on the local levels of government to establish those priorities, to work with the provincial entities and to see if we can get the different levels of government participating.

That is the essence of what has been taking place. Would we have liked to see some additional projects? Personally I would have loved to see the Chief Peguis extension. The member for Kildonan—St. Paul talked about the Chief Peguis extension. I agree that it is important. However, like me, she and other MPs who feel this is a priority should emphasize that to the City of Winnipeg. It is in a better position to prioritize the areas in our communities where those rare dollars will be invested. It is a limited amount of money at the end of the day, and we could spend a whole lot more than required.

I am very proud of the fact that we have a national government that is committed to investing in infrastructure. I would challenge any member of the opposition to demonstrate where in the last 50 years we have seen the type of commitment this government has made to building Canada's infrastructure from coast to coast to coast.

• (1810)

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague from Winnipeg North, and I want to bring three things to his attention.

The first is that the previous Conservative government governed in a recession. The current Liberal government has never been in a recession. It may cause one, but it has not governed in one yet.

Second, the previous government invested \$150 billion in infrastructure, during a recession, to save jobs and corporations, including the auto industry and others. It was very successful at that and it got the money out the door. The Liberal government has said that it has an investment plan in infrastructure, but it has not gotten the money out the door.

The third thing is that the previous Conservative government, while it got the money out the door in a recession, had a plan to balance the budget in seven years and did it in six. The Liberal government, not in a recession, has not spent the money and still has a huge deficit on top of it all.

Does my colleague across the way agree with me?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, I do not agree because that is factually incorrect. If we look at when Stephen Harper assumed power, he inherited a multi-billion dollar surplus. The recession did not occur until two years after he was in that majority situation and in those first two years he had two years of deficits. If we add up the total deficits over the Stephen Harper era, it is well over \$150 billion. Therefore, the facts of reality or history will clearly demonstrate that maybe the question could have been phrased a bit better.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his speech, but he is not focusing on the problem.

For the Bloc Québécois, the problem is not the investment in infrastructure, since that is where money should be invested. The problem is that the federal government is imposing its criteria on Quebec and the provinces. For example, with regard to airports, why can it decide to build an airport in the middle of a corn field? It can do so because it is the federal level that imposes its criteria. That is just one example, but we could give several more.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary why it is so difficult to agree to the Bloc's request that the government provide a lump-sum transfer and let Quebec allocate the money.

*[English]*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, what the Bloc members want is to take  $x$  number of dollars, give it to the provinces and not care about how they spend that money. Canadians in all regions, including Quebec, recognize that at times there is a national interest. For example, we as a government want to see infrastructure built to complement green initiatives. Part of those infrastructure dollars is being encouraged to ensure we are more sensitive to the environment and is universally applied across the entire nation. I see that as a good thing. We are responding to the citizens of Canada in all regions. Not all provinces are as progressive as others and it is important that the national government demonstrate leadership. Therefore, when I see the tie-ins the Bloc members would oppose, I see opportunities for Canada as a nation to move forward in an area, such as building our infrastructure in a multi-faceted way that includes consideration of our environment, something I know many people in Quebec and across Canada are very much in favour of.

- (1815)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed requested and deferred to Wednesday, January 29, immediately after the disposal of Ways and Means Motion No. 2.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 p.m.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

*[English]*

### FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as you are probably aware, last fall we had the lowest return of

the Fraser River sockeye in recorded history. This is the largest salmon-bearing stream in the world. We had low returns in Clayoquot, in the Skeena, in the Kennedy. Last year in the Kennedy, we did not have a single returning spawning fish. This is a salmon-bearing area that produced 200,000 fish just decades ago.

It is clear that there is a salmon emergency taking place in British Columbia. A crisis is taking place in British Columbia.

We have been raising issues related to the catastrophic decline of salmon in our region and the impact it is having. We have been calling on the government for investments in restoration, in habitat protection, in climate adaptation investments, and we see the government dragging its feet.

In 2019, our commercial fleet was only able to harvest 3.5 million pounds of salmon compared to almost 37 million pounds in 2016. The year 2019 was the lowest year since 1951, when we harvested 200 million pounds.

As I have said, we are seeing a catastrophic decline in the number of salmon. The government has dragged its feet when it comes to dealing with open-cage salmon farms. We have had a terrible year. We had the highest infestation of sea lice. We have seen disease escalate and the transfer of PRV and infected fish into open-net fish farms. We have had a massive die-off of 200,000 fish, and the industry just blew it off as natural causes, and then we just had an escape of 20,000 Atlantic salmon, a foreign species, into Pacific waters over the holiday season.

I want to read a quote from B.C. Supreme Court Justice Bruce Cohen in the Cohen Commission report. He said:

...the potential harm posed to Fraser River sockeye salmon from salmon farms is serious and irreversible. Disease transfer occurs between wild and farmed fish, and I am satisfied that salmon farms along the sockeye migration route have the potential to introduce exotic diseases and to exacerbate endemic diseases that could have a negative impact on Fraser River sockeye.

We know this is happening. The government made a commitment to move to closed containment by 2025, and now we are hearing it is backtracking. It is saying it will only have a plan by 2025. I hope the parliamentary secretary will be able to answer those concerns.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union and Unifor are calling for immediate action by the government. They are asking for extended payments equalling maximum EI benefits to fishers, shore workers and tendermen who do not qualify for EI, and to extend the coverage period from August 2019 to June 2020.

We have written a letter to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion and have had no reply. She is a B.C. minister. We are hoping she will act soon, that she will refund the salmon licence fees paid for the 2019 season, make moorage in small craft harbours free for salmon vessels, make forgivable loans of up to \$10,000 available to vessel owners for repairs and maintenance, and implement the report that the fisheries and oceans committee unanimously supported on sharing risks and benefits.

We are calling on the government to come up with an emergency aid package, a record amount of investment in restoration, enhancement and adaptation funds. We need the government to do this immediately. People are losing their boats. They are losing their homes. Cupboards are empty. The ecosystem will crash if we do not save our wild salmon.

Will the Liberal government be the government on watch as our wild salmon goes the way of the Atlantic cod?

● (1820)

**Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like the member to know that I share his concerns regarding the health of our Pacific salmon stocks.

Protecting Pacific wild salmon is a priority for our government, and that is why we are taking urgent action to ensure that they are sustainable for generations to come and to support the communities that depend on them.

In B.C. in particular, salmon are iconic. They feed people, they contribute to our economy, they feed our southern resident killer whales and they have immense cultural significance to indigenous people. This is why our government has worked so hard to implement the wild salmon policy, return protections that add modern safeguards to the Fisheries Act and create a \$142-million salmon fund in partnership with the Province of British Columbia. Obviously there is still a lot of work to do.

Sadly, today many runs are in steep decline as a direct result of a number of factors, including habitat destruction, harvest and the effects of climate change. In 2018, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada reported that eight of 16 salmon populations are considered endangered, four are threatened, one is of special concern and the health of two remain unknown.

Just a few weeks ago I visited Big Bar with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to see first-hand the impact of the rock slide on the Fraser River. This was the minister's first visit to British Columbia as the minister, and the fact that she spent her first days in the province meeting with indigenous communities and stakeholders about wild Pacific salmon shows how large of a priority this is to our government.

The sheer magnitude of the rock slide and the effect on the migration of salmon cannot be understated. The hard work and collaboration on the ground between B.C. first nations, technical experts, the province, industry and other stakeholders has been an inspiring effort and will continue as we move forward.

Recently we announced a contract to begin work on rock remediation to allow for fish passage, come spawning season, and we are hopeful for a long-term solution. This phase of work will go on into the spring and should be completed before the first salmon runs arrive. The work will include breaking up and removing rocks from the site of the landslide, some of which are the size of homes.

British Columbians need to understand the scale of this problem. We are literally working to move mountains. The slide extended from an area that was 35 stories high and as wide as 18 stories across. It has been said that there is enough debris to fill up 10,000 dump trucks or fill the Pacific Coliseum.

We are hopeful that our efforts will be enough to create safe, natural passage for the 2020 runs, but we are preparing for the chance that we need to do more. That is exactly why we have established two technical working groups to help guide our contingency planning. Failure is not an option when it comes to protecting wild salmon, and we will make sure that every possible contingency is examined.

In the case that the slide area continues to present a height or water-velocity barrier in the 2020 season, we will be prepared. Indeed, it has been a particularly challenging year for workers and the families whose livelihood depends on this industry, and we sympathize with them. That is why the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans recently spoke to the Minister of Employment and Workforce Development, and we are working with all our departmental colleagues to explore options available.

The seriousness of this issue cannot be understated. Our government is giving it the level of national importance and attention that it deserves.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Madam Speaker, sympathy is not enough. It is like a natural disaster. It is like the forest fires in northern Alberta or the floods in eastern Canada, when the federal government came to the plate with an emergency package. It needs to do that in British Columbia. It will be under its watch that Pacific salmon will go the way of the Atlantic cod. It is gut-check time. Does the government have the intestinal fortitude, the courage to do the right thing and deliver an aid package?

We are counting on this parliamentary secretary, who is from British Columbia, to be the spokesperson, to stand up to his cabinet and ask them to do the right thing. People are losing their homes. This is our food security. Everything is interconnected on the west coast. Our whole ecosystem relies on our wild salmon. People are losing their homes, and while we appreciate the efforts by the government after the Big Bar slide, even before that, salmon had their lowest return in the Fraser.

The government needs to take action, and we are counting on this member right now.

**Mr. Terry Beech:** Madam Speaker, as I stated in my previous speech, wild Pacific salmon are a priority for our government. That is why we have restored protections in the Fisheries Act, invested in coastal restoration through our \$1.5-billion oceans protection plan and increased our level of ocean protection from less than 1% in 2015 to more than 13%. We will go further and take it to 25%.

We are investing in projects under the \$142 million B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund that will help conserve and protect Pacific salmon. This includes, for example, the Innovative Habitat Restoration Demonstration, which is being led by the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and another project that will allow first nations to partner on activities to assess, prioritize and restore critical salmon habitat in a wide variety of river systems throughout the province of British Columbia.

Our government is taking action to ensure that we continue to protect and restore our salmon stocks on the west coast, and we are going to do even more going forward.

• (1825)

## PRIVACY

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Madam Speaker, during tonight's adjournment debate, I will be speaking about the privacy rights of my constituents. I know for all members of the House privacy rights are important, and of course they are guaranteed by the charter. They are paramount to our identity as Canadians.

Unfortunately, the government has missed the boat on protecting privacy rights in southern New Brunswick. Some members may recall my question last year about Canada Post mail delivery to a beautiful part of my riding called Campobello Island. U.S. Customs and Border Protection continues to open and review Canada Post mail going to Campobello. That is because Campobello is Canadian territory but is only accessible year round by driving through the state of Maine for an hour.

The government responded to my question by stating, "We will be looking at this matter and will have further things to say on it in the future." I was expecting that in this minority Parliament where

the government is trying to work across the aisle, when a serious issue is brought to its attention, an issue that impacts the privacy rights of Canadians, it would act. Sadly, I was wrong.

My office has received a letter from Canada Post, which I will table after the adjournment proceedings. Quite frankly, the response from this government-owned Crown agency, Canada Post, is tone deaf. Canada Post says that the United States has a right to open the mail and that Canada Post understands "this has caused you concern".

Second, it says that the delivery route through Maine is "the only available option beyond seasonal ferry service". From what I understand, Canada Post has not requested use of that seasonal ferry service. It has not contacted the ferry operator whose craft is in the water and available for private or public charter.

Third, the letter says that Canada Post is working on resolving the matter with United States government officials and hopes to see "fewer delays in the coming weeks". Nearly two months have come and gone.

Here is the problem. The letter closes by saying, "to provide timely service, we ask that you refrain from ordering or sending items that cannot be sent by mail or that could be seized by a customs agent as they may delay passage of all mail through the border". Therefore, Canada Post is asking Canadians living on Campobello to use the mail less or not use it at all.

I have contacted Canada Post. I have brought this issue to the minister's attention, and Canada Post has contacted my office. However, once again, its explanation does not solve the problem. According to Canada Post, this whole problem is because cannabis is mailable within Canada. It is just a fluke of geography that necessitates the crossing of borders to reach Campobello that causes some challenges here.

However, a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian. Also, geography cuts both ways. That is because there is a place called Point Roberts in British Columbia that is U.S. territory and is only accessible by passing through Canadian territory. The U.S. mail that is going to Point Roberts is not being opened by CBSA officials. Perhaps it is time that we did so.

I have some questions for my colleagues in the government this evening. Why has the issue of U.S. border official agents searching Canada Post mail still not been resolved? What will the Liberals do today, not in the future, to protect the privacy rights of Canadian residents living on Campobello?

• (1830)

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from New Brunswick Southwest and I have been acquainted over the years. I think he would indulge me for a brief moment as I extend my condolences to the family of Joan Lee, the spouse of Sheldon Lee, a great servant of Charlotte County and mentor of mine. He is a truly a legendary figure in Charlotte County politics. At the same time, I want to extend my personal greetings to the people of Charlotte County and the Fundy Isles with whom I have become acquainted over the years.

I take great interest in the issue the member raises. This is a vexing conundrum. The people of Campobello Island know the uniqueness of their geography and their proximity to the United States, the fact that one has to cross the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Bridge to re-enter Canada and get access to their beautiful corner of Canada. That is something well known to them, and it has caused them to come up with inventive solutions to all manner of things. This situation is no less.

The Government of Canada and Canada Post will have to come up with an inventive solution. This has seemingly been brought on by the legalization of cannabis, which has caused the border and customs authorities in the United States to want to go through Canadians' mail. That is distasteful to Canadians, and we want to avoid it.

Canada Post representatives have worked and will continue to work on innovative solutions with their U.S. counterparts, as I know government officials will with their U.S. counterparts. As the member alluded to, we seek a sustainable transportation solution that could allow us to send mail directly to the island.

We invite the Higgs government to continue to propose solutions, including transportation solutions, that it may be interested in supporting that we could rely upon for the mail. I leave that all to the discussions that are occurring very actively among officials. This is something we will continue to have a great interest in. We want to continue to work on this issue and solve it for the people of Campobello Island.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the response from the hon. member. It is clear that he is familiar with this corner of my riding, New Brunswick Southwest, Charlotte County.

I would point out that it is not up to the citizens living in Campobello to solve this problem. The hon. member suggested they have come up with innovative solutions in the past. That is because the people in Campobello have had no choice to do so. They feel, rightly, the government has let them down. I appreciate the member's opening of the door to providing help on, perhaps, a year-round ferry in Campobello from the Higgs government, should it come to the federal government seeking infrastructure dollars to build and operate such a ferry service.

However, as the member knows, ferry services are not built overnight and we need a solution to this matter right away. I will point out again, for the record, that these Canada Post mail trucks are bonded. They should not be inspected by U.S. customs agencies and doing so is an infringement on our rights as Canadians.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Madam Speaker, I think the member took a few liberties with my answer. Suffice to say we are very interested in finding innovative solutions. We are not, of course, asking the people of Campobello Island to solve this on their own. That is patently false.

We are interested in solutions, as the McKenna government did, for example, in building the Grand Manan ferry, or as our other provincial governments did when they went and found sustainable transportation solutions of their own.

The Higgs government is invited to come up with some sustainable transportation solutions for the people of Campobello Island. We would be very interested in hearing about those. I would invite the Higgs government and the Government of New Brunswick to let us know what they might have in mind there. Of course, we will be actively working on all fronts to make sure the people of Campobello Island, who are indeed Canadians, and Canadians are Canadians are Canadians, get the full attention of this government as we work through this problem.

• (1835)

### AGRICULTURE

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to ask supplemental questions tonight with respect to a question I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on December 13. It is well known that right now farmers, not only in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon, but all across the country, are suffering from a lack of access to foreign markets. This is particularly difficult for our soybean and canola farmers.

I asked a very specific question on what steps are going to be taken. I received an answer that I did not quite feel to be satisfactory to the farmers in my riding or across the country, something about “we stand with, we are going to have some meetings, we are going to talk, this, that and the other thing”.

What is really happening is that we have lost access for foreign markets as a result of unresolved trade disputes that the government seems incapable of taking any action on.

The U.S. has had similar problems and it brought forward a \$28-billion market stabilization fund for U.S. farmers. Good for them. The problem we are having with that now is that allows them to do a whole bunch of things. Number one, they can sell their product to other markets that are not closed, at a price that is much cheaper than Canadian farmers can. What they can also do is sell their product into Canada at a price much cheaper than our farmers can sell here in Canada.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

This is the big problem and I met with the Dufferin Federation of Agriculture. Hard-working farmers whose livelihoods are being severely affected by this met with me. Most farmers do not just farm soy or canola, they have a whole bunch of other things they do. On top of this issue, they are now struggling with the fact that they had a wet harvest in Ontario. They now have to pay to dry their corn and wheat. On top of that, they are getting slammed with a carbon tax. Some farmers are getting bills for \$1,400 worth of carbon tax just to try and dry their product so they can get it to market, with no relief in sight from the government.

To make matters worse, many farmers in my riding across Ontario and across Canada are also cattle farmers. In Ontario, they have a complete lack of processing capacity due to the closure of the processing facility in Toronto. A farmer told me that in November she looked for a new place to have her beef processed and was told it could be processed in April. What happens to that family? They now have to pay to feed those cattle for the next four and a half months, the cattle will be overweight, and they will get less at market and pay penalties.

This is a catastrophic crisis in farming communities all across this country and in particular in Dufferin—Caledon. What they do not need are platitudes. I am not feeling very confident that we are going to get any concrete answers. They do not want platitudes like “we stand with” or “we are going to have a meeting”. They also do not want the government to say it will give them some loans. Farmers do not want loans, they want solutions to the problems. They want access to foreign markets fixed. They want processing capacity restored.

For the farmers in my riding and the farmers across the country, I would like an actual solution and not platitudes.

**Mr. Neil Ellis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, this is the first time I have risen in the House this session and I would like to thank all the people in the Bay of Quinte for relying on me to represent them here in Ottawa.

Our government fully recognizes that the uncertainty of China's trade environment has impacted our canola and soybean industries. We remain committed to working in close collaboration with the provincial governments, industry and Canadian farmers to restore full market access for Canadian canola seed and predictable trade solutions for soybeans to China. The government knows that China is an important market for the Canadian soybean sector. At this time, there are no official technical market access restrictions for Canadian soybeans to China. However, we recognize that the agriculture sector remains vulnerable to non-tariff trade barriers impacting exports to China.

Canada has a dedicated agriculture team at the Canadian embassy in Beijing, working on market access issues and market development efforts. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is working closely with the embassy to address trade issues and advance Canadian agricultural interests in China. The Government of Canada continues to increase efforts to advance Canada's trade interest in China, including the appointment of Dominic Barton as Canada's ambassador to China. He is working on the ground and is committed to the long-term viability of the sector.

As for canola, regaining full market access for Canadian canola seed to China remains a top priority for our government. Canada continues to engage with China on multiple fronts to resolve this important issue, including through technical discussions and senior official dialogue with Chinese authorities. We have also engaged China through formal consultation through the World Trade Organization. At the same time, the Government of Canada is delivering financial supports to producers through the enhancements made under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's advance payments program and the extension of the repayment periods on cash advances for eligible producers. The increase in the interest-free limit for 2019 canola advances has allowed close to 6,120 producers to receive more than \$1.43 billion in interest-free advances, providing them with the added flexibility to manage their farm operations and explore new market opportunities.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is also working with her colleagues across Canada to review our business risk management programs, starting with the AgriStability program, to ensure they are helping producers manage the weather and market risks they face. We also remain focused on working with industry to undertake market diversification efforts to give Canadian exporters access to more markets, while reducing the risk associated with market closures. We recognize the importance of diversifying our trade to ensure Canadian farmers have access to new markets as we keep growing our exports in order to reach the ambitious target to grow our agriculture and food exports to \$75 billion by 2025.

We remain committed to supporting the agriculture sector by maximizing emerging market opportunities and advancing Canada's agricultural interests in all export markets, including China.

● (1840)

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Madam Speaker, I have two supplemental questions.

The parliamentary secretary used phrases like “this is a top priority” and “we are engaging at the highest levels”. Does he have any time frame whatsoever for these disputes to be resolved? That is number one.

With respect to accessing new markets, what are the new markets that the government is looking for, what is it doing to let farmers know that they are going to have access to these new markets and when does it anticipate any new markets opening up?

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Mr. Neil Ellis:** Madam Speaker, we know that producers are currently facing serious weather and market challenges. In support of industry's market diversification efforts, the AgriMarketing program is a five-year, \$121-million program under the Canadian agriculture partnership that provides funding to support industry's efforts to increase and diversify exports to international markets through industry-led promotional activities.

The Canola Council of Canada has received over \$3.5 million for activities such as promotion, missions and research to help the canola sector diversify and increase trade to numerous markets, including China, the United States, Mexico, Japan and the European Union. We are putting forth full efforts and leveraging every avail-

able channel on the ground, both in China and here in Canada, to restore full market access for our canola seed. Our investments under AgriMarketing are also helping Soy Canada conduct trade missions to key markets like Japan to help the industry maximize opportunities under the CPTPP.

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

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