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Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

MAIN ESTIMATES, 2022-23

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 2023, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Main Estimates, 2022-23.

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FEDERAL TAX EXPENDITURES

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, in both official languages, a document entitled “2022 Report on Federal Tax Expenditures”.

* * *

• (1005)

AN ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of

the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled “Moving Towards Ending Homelessness Among Veterans”.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the clerk, the analyst, the interpreters and all the staff who supported us during the study that resulted in this report.

[*English*]

FINANCE

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled “Bill C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures”.

I will take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee, the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters and everybody else who helped make this happen, as well as the legislative clerks who helped with getting this report together.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I 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—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House:

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(a) any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts or that would reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected; and

(b) the formula for apportioning seats in the House must be amended and the House call on the government to act accordingly.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish you a very pleasant day, and I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time.

Discussions on redistribution have been going on for some time. These days, however, current events have an unfortunate tendency to occupy public space and, in many respects, our debates and discussions here.

The Bloc Québécois is moving a motion to protect the Quebec nation's political weight within the Canadian federation, as long as Quebecers have not chosen to take a different path that will make the Quebec nation a friend of the Canadian nation, rather than a nation subject to another nation. In the meantime, Quebec's political weight must be protected.

I can already hear certain analysts and esteemed colleagues, who are opponents after all, saying that this is not the time to do this, because of the pandemic. I would remind members that we are also facing a climate crisis. Some will also say this is not the right time because of the war going on. Not all that long ago we were talking about emergency measures, but the government changed its mind 44 hours later, so this would not be the time to talk about Quebec's political weight.

The point is that now is the time to talk about it. In light of everything that is going on, we must measure Quebec's weight. We are facing challenges that we can overcome together, freely and without being subject to numbers within institutions where the Quebec nation holds less and less space.

If the affairs of the state could be managed by statistics alone, then we would need to ask ourselves what we are doing here. If lining up three columns of numbers automatically programs the result and the consequences, then we need to ask ourselves what we are doing here.

It is because there are decisions that sometimes stray from the sacred column of numbers that we have elected members. Members are elected to use their judgment, to represent the people who elected them, but they are also elected to use their conscience when an unanticipated situation arises.

Because of the people who are called upon to take action, the values they cherish, and history, we cannot allow decisions to be made by statistics. History is what got us to this point.

For all these reasons, it is unacceptable that Quebec's weight could be reduced within any kind of Canadian institution at this point in time. That is true for everyone.

Imagine that I am a federalist. Members would have to have a very active imagination, but they need not hold their breath as it will not happen. All the same, imagine that I am a Quebecer who aspires to lead the Conservative Party and who is thinking about staging a comeback. If that were the case, I would say that it is important to maintain Quebec's political weight, because that is proof that Canada truly loves Quebec. After all, the Conservative Party

was present for the 1995 love-in. In reality, I am at the opposite end of the spectrum, where I am much more comfortable, almost in a state of bliss, and I can say that I am a sovereignist.

In the meantime, we must not allow ourselves to be weakened. Protecting Quebec's political weight is good for everyone who recognizes the existence of the Quebec nation. Not that long ago, on June 16, 2021, the House of Commons voted to recognize Quebec as a nation, with 281 MPs voting in favour and a few voting against. A handful suddenly came down with stomach aches. The House voted to recognize Quebec as a nation, whose only official language and only common language is French.

• (1010)

If that recognition means anything, the House needs to back up those words with action. Today's motion is a small step. All we are trying to say is that Quebec's weight must not be reduced. We do not want Quebec to lose a seat. That has not happened since 1966, as my esteemed colleague and parliamentary leader will point out.

We will soon introduce a bill to ensure that Quebec's weight—

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I ask hon. members who want to have conversations to please take them into the lobbies. Thank you very much.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, they have a leadership race to sort out. They need a bit of a break.

Back to more serious things. I simply want to say that we will be introducing a bill that would protect Quebec's weight within Canadian institutions. This does not mean that we, as good neighbours, no longer wish to work together. We want to continue working together with the Canadian entity, no matter how it is defined in the future.

The Bloc Québécois will introduce a bill because, in the meantime, Quebec needs to have weight to protect the best interests of Quebecers, to promote Quebec and to be able to defend Quebec's ideas, including the ones that will be studied soon. The Official Languages Act should not be enforced in Quebec, which manages the French language quite well, and, what is more, the Quebec government is the best in the world at protecting its historic minority, the anglophone minority.

We need this weight to defend culture, arts and communications, especially with respect to broadcasting. This topic will be discussed soon and the discussion must reflect Quebec's unique perspective.

In order to do this, we need a voice that cannot be diminished or grow weaker by the day within Canadian institutions. We want to at least maintain what we have, with the expectation to get more.

• (1015)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am someone with a very strong passion for the distinct nature of the province of Quebec and an ancestral heritage that comes from the province of Quebec. My question for the leader is from something he made reference to. He is wearing a ribbon on his lapel for what is happening in Ukraine today and in a show of solidarity with the world. I am wondering, given all the things in the world today, why at the very first opportunity for Bloc members to have an opposition day, they would not attempt to address those types of issues. The member made reference to it in his comments and I am wondering if he could expand on why he felt this was the most important thing on the agenda for the Bloc.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, despite the temptation to do otherwise, I will try to maintain what little positive atmosphere we have here. I understand that the member's question was written before he rose and before he even heard the opening of my brief speech.

Of course members will say that now is not the right time. It is never the right time. It will never be the right time for the Quebec nation to have more influence.

However, it is always the right time. In fact, there is no better time, given my colleague's shameful reference to Ukraine. I say "shameful" because we are talking about the right to self-determination, a legitimate right. Self-determination is acquired, but it also must be defended, and Quebec is in an excellent position, as a nation, to tell Ukraine that we stand with them in friendship and solidarity.

[English]

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I recall sitting in the House about a year ago when the leader of the Bloc Québécois stated that oil is dead. As we have seen in the last few days, it is obvious that the member was wrong. It is a situation where we have seen the oil and gas sector become a major contributor again to the Canadian economy, which will help health transfer payments to the Province of Quebec.

I wonder if the leader of the Bloc Québécois would go on record admitting that he was wrong when he said oil is dead. Oil is actually going to help what the member is looking for, which is more federal health transfers to the Province of Quebec, and this ties into exactly what he is asking for today.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, I stand corrected. Obviously, my colleague was not talking about Jean Charest's campaign. Mr. Charest is opposed to pipelines and he is behind the carbon tax. My colleague must have been talking about someone else. That is to his credit because the Conservatives are entitled to their own leadership race.

There is another race, the race for the planet's survival. Some people say that they believe in climate change as long as they do not have to do anything about it. As long as it is pointless and

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meaningless, they recognize it. However, the reality is that we need to take action. Some members think it is inappropriate to say that oil is dead, but oil has to at least be in intensive care if we want the planet to have a decent future.

• (1020)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing forward today's motion, which the NDP will, of course, support.

This motion is in line with a bill introduced in 2011 by the former NDP member for Compton—Stanstead. That bill sought to guarantee minimum representation in the number of members for the province of Quebec, as is already the case for seven provinces and territories. This is nothing new; most provinces and territories already have minimum representation in the House of Commons. Therefore, we obviously support this motion.

I would like to ask the leader of the Bloc Québécois what he thinks would have happened if the Liberals and Conservatives had supported the bill introduced in 2011. Would we be having this discussion today if they had done the right thing 10 years ago?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, despite the temptation, I always avoid rewriting history.

I will avoid rewriting history by going back to 2011, and I will say instead that I understand that the NDP will support the Bloc Québécois today, and that I imagine the NDP will also support my party's bill when we introduce it.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think it is important to read the motion so that we understand what we are talking about:

That, in the opinion of the House: (a) any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts or that would reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected;

In the motion, there is an "or", but based on what we are currently seeing, there is an "and". Quebec is losing its political representation in the House of Commons but—and this is historic—Quebec will also lose a seat. That has not happened since 1966.

People think that it is understandable that Quebec's demographic representation would cause such a drop. Basically, Quebec is treated as a province, except that we are not a province. We are a nation, and we must be treated as one.

Our culture is different, our language is different, our way of living and doing things are different, and our economy is structured differently. We are more in favour of fighting climate change. At least, that seems obvious to some in the House of Commons.

When I was young, and I was young once, Félix Leclerc passed away. In 1988, Quebec mourned the passing of its poet. The rest of Canada wondered who Félix Leclerc was.

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This goes to show just how far apart we are. We are not better—just different. This difference needs to be felt in the House of Commons while we are still here. The dream of every sovereignist and every Bloc Québécois member is to put ourselves out of a job and go to Quebec City, so that half of the taxes we pay are not defended by 22.5% of the people here, but instead by 100% of the people in Quebec City. That is what we want.

I mentioned Félix Leclerc. People may say that that was to be expected in 1988, but since then there has been a referendum, and Canadians have become a little closer, especially after the love-in with Jean Charest.

Last year we lost Michel Louvain. We made a member's statement about Michel Louvain. In the House, we could sense that people were wondering, "who's that guy?", "who is Michael Luvine?" Ask any Quebecer who is *la belle inconnue*, the beautiful stranger. They will say it is *la dame en bleu seule à sa table*, the lady in blue alone at her table. This is what Quebec is.

Our colleague, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, gave an exceptional 10-minute speech last week precisely to explain what Quebec is. I invite everyone to listen to it again. It was simply magnificent.

Let us come back to the fact that Quebec is a nation. Last year, we adopted a motion recognizing that Quebec forms a nation. We passed it here in the House. What is more, we really pushed the envelope. When I left home, my wife said to me, "they will never do that". I told her that I was confident that it would work, because we have a good leader. In the end, not only was Quebec recognized as a nation, but French was also recognized as the common language of the Quebec nation.

When people voted in favour of this motion, they probably thought that they were throwing us a bone to placate us. It could be that they are tired of hearing us say that we are different. They may have told us that we were a nation just to humour us, while thinking that it would serve no purpose anyway.

That, however is not true; it does serve a purpose. We have to follow up on words, on a label. It has to be useful. We must be consistent when we solemnly vote in the House on opinions, on ideas.

The time has come for these people to speak out. I am talking, among others, about the 35 Liberal members from Quebec in the House. I cannot conceive that these people could vote against the idea that Quebec deserves, at worst, to maintain its political weight in the House and, at best, to improve its situation. We will watch them carefully. It is time for them to follow through on what they voted on.

• (1025)

Yesterday in the House, we were talking about Ukraine, much to the delight of the member for Winnipeg. I asked the Deputy Prime Minister a question, and she stood up in the House and affirmed that Quebec is a nation. She said that right here in the House as we were discussing international policy. Now is the time to walk the talk.

The calculations indicate that Quebec would lose a member, whereas the House as a whole would gain four. That means multi-

ple setbacks for us, and it is not acceptable. People might say it makes sense because our demographic weight is declining, but Quebec cannot be punished by a statistic like that because, as I said, Quebec is a nation. That is what matters.

People might also say it makes sense because we do not bring in enough immigrants. The Liberal government wants to welcome 430,000 immigrants. It does not take a Ph.D. in math to figure out that, if Canada brings in 430,000 immigrants, Quebec has to get 100,000 of them to maintain its political weight. We like immigrants, or course, but to protect the French fact in Quebec, we have to welcome them and enable them to integrate so they can live their lives fully in Quebec. That means making sure those 100,000 people can truly be part of Quebec society.

Our National Assembly has stated that bringing in more than 50,000 would be a herculean task. All the parties agreed on that. Bringing in 100,000 is just not realistic, and it puts us in an impossible position. If we play the statistics game, open up and bring people in, we will have problems with Quebec's French character, which will suffer. It would enable us to maintain our power in the House, but it would chip away at the French language, which must be protected. Everyone knows that.

We are being forced to choose between the two. We can respect the concerns of the National Assembly and admit that, in order for immigration to be successful, we must welcome people and ensure that they are well integrated. That means that Quebec's political weight would inevitably shrink, as it has been since 1867. Fewer and fewer Quebecers are rising in the House to speak. Quebec's political weight in Canada as we know it is already quite weak and is diminishing all the time.

We absolutely must stop this erosion. The only way to do so is to eliminate the responsibility of statistics in assessing the political weight of a nation. That is what we must do now. First we must determine how the problem affects Quebecers, and then we must come up with a remedy like the one being proposed by the member for Drummond. He introduced a bill in the House that would ensure that Quebec's political weight would be maintained over time because Quebec is a nation. In a way, 77% of the Quebec nation is dominated by a nation that is not ours. When we look at the numbers, it becomes clear that the best way to protect the Quebec nation is to make it a sovereign state.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the importance of action, and action does speak louder than words. Yesterday, we brought in Bill C-11, which would modernize the Canada Broadcasting Act. Part of the argument for it, as the minister responsible, who is an MP from Quebec, said, is the importance of the francophone and French communities, particularly in Quebec and throughout Canada, and ensuring that there is more content and more investment in the arts community. This government has invested hugely in arts programming, because we recognize it in the province of Quebec. Today, we also have the introduction of the languages bill, which will again ensure that French will continue to be spoken across Canada in record numbers.

Could the member provide his thoughts on those actions?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, did my colleague really say that Bill C-13 would increase the francophone population of Canada? Is he unaware of the statistics? Has he not understood that since 1867, French has been disappearing from the rest of Canada? If he wants and perceives his country to be bilingual, the best way to achieve that is for Quebec to remain powerful, because it is the representative of the francophonie and an inspiration to the rest of Canada. Francophones in the rest of Canada are in distress and are suffering death by a thousand cuts, yet my colleague says that the situation is rosy in the rest of Canada.

Seriously, I do not even know why I am wasting my breath answering a question like that.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy listening to my colleague from La Prairie, for whom I have a great deal of esteem and respect.

Today's motion is along the same lines as something the NDP proposed in 2011 through our member for Compton—Stanstead. It sets a threshold for Quebec, which just makes sense. We already have thresholds for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. There are thresholds in most provinces and territories.

The NDP proposed creating a threshold for Quebec as well, and the Liberals and Conservatives rejected that in 2012. I wanted to ask my colleague why the Liberals and Conservatives rejected something that just makes sense.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is on the right track, and he is right to point out what seems obvious. The NDP agrees on this, so it will vote in favour of the motion. The Bloc Québécois is quite pleased and welcomes that.

Now my colleague is asking whether the Conservatives and the Liberals will vote in favour. As I said, I cannot imagine that the 35 Liberal members from Quebec would not agree that their nation

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and its political weight in the House of Commons deserve to be protected.

I will be really disappointed if those members stand up. They often disappoint me, but I think this really would be the last straw.

• (1035)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He spoke a lot about seat distribution. In 2015, with the redistribution of seats, we gained a seat in Calgary. As my NDP colleague just stated, some provinces gain seats, and others lose them.

I would like to ask my colleague from La Prairie the following: If it were up to him to decide, or if he had to advise the government, which province should lose a seat instead of Quebec?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I salute my colleague and her question.

However, I am somewhat disappointed. When I was a teacher, my students sometimes did not understand what I was saying. Because I am kind, I would always tell them that it was because I had not communicated well. I gave a 10-minute speech, but I did not communicate well. The answer to my colleague's question lies in what I just said.

To summarize, my colleague spoke of a province and emphasized the term "province", but Quebec is not a province, it is a nation. People need to understand that. I will repeat: It is not a province, it is a nation.

All I am saying is that no matter what happens in the rest of Canada, which is of no consequence to me, the Quebec nation and its political weight must be protected because Quebec is not like Manitoba—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. Unfortunately, I must interrupt the member.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to this Bloc Québécois motion.

I was introduced as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, which is one of my roles, but I am speaking—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. I would ask members to be quiet while the hon. member is giving his speech.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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I rise today in the House to share my perspective, not only as a member with official duties here in Parliament, but also, more importantly, as a Quebecker. I am speaking today as a proud member of Parliament from Quebec, my home province, the place I grew up in and the place my parents immigrated to. They settled and started a family in Quebec. Quebec is where I have had the pleasure of spending almost my entire life, aside from a few years at university. Quebec is where I have chosen to start my family and where my wife and I have raised our three children. Quebec is also where my two grandchildren were born. I am a proud Quebecker through and through.

I love the passion of the member for La Prairie, but as I was listening to his impassioned speech, I sometimes felt that he missed the point a bit. Allow me to explain.

Let us look at what the Bloc Québécois motion that was moved in the House today by the member for Beloeil—Chambly says.

That, in the opinion of the House:

(a) any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts or that would reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected; and

(b) the formula for apportioning seats in the House must be amended and the House call on the government to act accordingly.

There is a fine line here. I agree with part of the motion but disagree with another part. I will explain and provide my reasons for that in the hopes of convincing all of my colleagues from all parties, particularly those outside Quebec, to see things the way I do.

I will start by establishing the basis for my argument. Then I will explain the options that are available. That is where I disagree with the Bloc motion. Finally, I would like to propose a solution that I hope the Bloc will play a constructive role in.

Here is the part I agree with. Quebec should not lose a seat in the House of Commons. As my colleague, the NDP House leader and member for New Westminster—Burnaby said, there is a way to establish a threshold, a minimum, that would prevent Quebec from losing a seat. I think it can be said that no province should lose seats.

The part I disagree with is what is implied in the second part of the Bloc's motion, that "[the reduction of] Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected". I do not want Quebec to lose its demographic weight. However, there is a fairly simple solution to ensure that that does not happen. Quebec must keep its demographic weight.

● (1040)

We are a long way from the Canada of 1867. The way to do it in 2022 is to find a solution by trying to bring up the birth rate and the immigration rate. We must encourage people, especially francophones, to come and settle in Quebec from elsewhere in Canada. I have a good example, but I would like to start with some facts.

There are four formulas for determining the number of seats in the House of Commons. A very precise non-partisan system has been developed over the years. The formula for assigning the number of seats has evolved since Confederation in 1867. We know that there was a lot of what is known as politicking back then, and a lot of gerrymandering to determine the ridings. Fortunately, those days

are gone and we now have a strictly non-partisan system for determining ridings in Canada.

How do we determine the number of seats in each province and territory?

There are four steps. First, the initial number of seats must be established. "The number of seats initially allocated to each province is calculated by dividing the population number of each province by the electoral quotient." The electoral quotient for the year 2022 is 121,891. "The electoral quotient is obtained by multiplying the quotient of the last decennial redistribution (111,166) by the average of the population growth rates of the 10 provinces (9.647%) in the last 10 years." The last decennial redistribution took place in 2011.

Canada is growing so fast, it is incredible. It has grown by almost 10% in 10 years. Quebec is also growing, but unfortunately, not at the same rate as the national average.

The second step in calculating seats is the application of special clauses that have been established over the years. This means that "adjustments are made to account for the 'senatorial clause'", which "guarantees that no province has fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has in the Senate." We see this in the case of Prince Edward Island, an island that was part of Canada at the time of its founding. To ensure its entry into the Confederation, it was promised four seats in the House of Commons and four seats in the Senate.

Not only is there this senatorial clause, but there is also the grandfather clause, which "guarantees each province no fewer seats than it had in 1985".

● (1045)

At the time, if I am not mistaken, it was Saskatchewan that was losing a seat because of a shrinking population, so the grandfather clause was created.

The third step is the application of the representation rule. Following the application of the special clauses, if a province that was overrepresented in the House of Commons at the completion of the last redistribution process becomes under-represented relative to its population, it will be given extra seats so that its share of seats is proportional to its share of the population. This is very important, and this rule has only been applied to Quebec. It goes back some 30 years. It is important to reinforce that this rule applies if its share of seats is not proportional to its share of the population.

The fourth step deals with territorial seats and the final calculation. Basically, each territory is guaranteed one seat in the House of Commons. This is a way of ensuring that there will always be at least three seats.

Under this formula, the commission is suggesting that a seat be taken away from Quebec. As I said at the outset, as a Quebecker, I do not think that is desirable. That is why we must do everything we can to avoid this situation. We must therefore figure out how we can avoid it, given what we have in front of us.

I think that the way to do this is to revisit that grandfather clause. This is important, and I think that this is the solution. Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois motion goes a bit further. Not only does it call for Quebec to not lose a seat, but it also calls for Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons not to be reduced.

There is one province that has not lost a seat: Prince Edward Island. Each member in that province represents about 40,000 people. I do not want that to happen in Quebec. Quebec is not Prince Edward Island. I have a lot of respect for my Islander friends. I love them, and I love visiting their province. However, I do think that Quebec is distinct, and so I do not want there to be a commitment that Quebec will always be guaranteed a quarter of the seats in the House of Commons, regardless of its population. We could end up with a situation where members would represent very few people compared to their colleagues in other provinces. I think that this would diminish our legitimacy. As I said at the beginning, I am speaking as the proud member for Hull—Aylmer and a proud Quebecker.

I think that the solution is to set a threshold for Quebec, to make sure that Quebec does not lose a seat. In the meantime, I hope that the Bloc Québécois will join me in promoting the long-term solution. That solution is to think about getting more people to come to Quebec to learn the French language and to embrace our beautiful culture and our beautiful language. I think that this is really the solution.

• (1050)

This is really the solution, and I urge the Bloc Québécois to support this idea. I heard the hon. member for La Prairie speak of his love of immigration and new Quebeckers. I agree with him wholeheartedly. We need to go a bit farther, encourage immigration, request our share of immigrants and target countries where there are people who would like to settle in Canada or Quebec and live in French.

I will use the five minutes I have left to describe one fine example, namely my riding of Hull—Aylmer, which is growing rapidly. Where is this growth coming from? Immigration, in particular from French-speaking Africa. These people settle in Quebec and are fluent in French since it is their first language. They are prepared to adapt their culture and adopt the culture of our beautiful region, Outaouais.

Many of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois temporarily become my constituents five days a week when Parliament is sitting. I appreciate their presence and enjoy being their representative here in the House of Commons.

Outaouais, and especially Hull—Aylmer, is the second most popular immigration destination in Quebec. Of course, more immigrants arrive in Montreal, but only two-thirds of them stay there. In Outaouais, and especially in Hull—Aylmer, the western part of that region, 98% of immigrants from French-speaking Africa settle

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there permanently. We are very welcoming. We are a model for Quebec. We are very grateful to these people for their contribution to our *joie de vivre* and our way of seeing things. They too are proud Quebeckers. They are also proud Canadians.

What I am proposing is the model to follow, and it is feasible. No one can convince me that we could not find 100,000 francophones in the world who would like to settle here and benefit from what we have in Quebec. That is obvious.

That is the long-term solution. I urge my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois to join me and become part of the solution, as they did yesterday with their excellent work during the debate on Ukraine. I saw the willingness of Bloc members to be part of the solution.

They could amend their motion before the end of the day. I am reaching out and inviting them to be part of the solution. We must find a way to get all members on board with the motion, in order to make sure that Quebec keeps the same number of seats. We need to find a solution to make sure that Quebec not only maintains its demographic weight in Canada but actually increases it, as it should. I would be proud to be a part of that.

• (1055)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer for his speech. Since he is also my representative, that gives me an idea. I could transfer a few cases in my riding to him. We could join forces.

I found several parts of my colleague's speech very interesting, in particular the one in which he proposed having more babies. I would like him to know that, in Quebec, we experienced that with the "*revanche des berceaux*", or revenge of the cradle: At one time, parish priests insisted that women who already had seven, eight or nine children have more. Quebec has done its part.

It seems that my colleague is also confusing demographic weight and political weight. I would like to make a small clarification to the perception he appears to have of the motion put forward by my colleague, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and member for Beauce—Chamby.

We are not talking about Quebec as a province. We define Quebec as a nation. From this point of view, the motion put forward today by the Bloc Québécois is perfect just the way it is.

Does my colleague from Hull—Aylmer recognize, as the House of Commons did on June 16, 2021, that Quebec is a nation whose only official and common language is French, a welcoming nation that wishes to accept more francophone immigrants and to facilitate the integration of these valuable future citizens?

After he answers this, could he also explain why, although we want to open Quebec's doors to francophone immigration, his government, through the Department of Immigration, discriminates almost systematically against francophone African students who wish, as my colleague himself would like, to settle in Quebec?

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Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, or should I say my constituent, for his questions. I will answer several right now and keep his final question for last, so that I can give a more thorough answer.

The answer is yes. Not only do I recognize that Quebec is a nation, but I am very happy that it is recognized as such. This is my answer, and so on for all the other questions, except the final one.

Canada and Quebec have an immigration agreement. Quebec said it was going to establish immigration levels. However, for many years, the admission target did not even reach 51,000 immigrants. Then it lowered that target to 40,000. That will not help Quebec maintain its demographic weight in Canada. We agree on the advantages and importance of immigration, but if we do not let people in, that does not make sense.

I think that it is very important to open Quebec up to francophone immigrants and to focus on that aspect. Francophone immigrants are ready to come to Quebec to continue speaking their first language. In western Africa and, I hope, in other parts of the world, there are a lot of people who would like to settle here. I think that there is a single solution that would enable us to address both issues.

Once again, I invite my friends in the Bloc Québécois to join me in proposing something that everyone can support.

• (1100)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP supports the motion. It supports the principle of maintaining the constitutional balance in Canada and preserving Quebec's role and votes in the House of Commons. I agree with that.

My problem is with the fact that my Bloc Québécois colleagues claim that the French language is disappearing across the country. That is not true. I invite them to visit northern Ontario, where the French language is doing very well.

Can my colleague explain the role of bilingualism across Canada in 2022?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for his question. I think that French needs a lot of support, since it is very fragile. If you look at the situation closely, I agree that we can do better. That is why I am supporting the Minister of Official Languages, the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

I think that there is always a way to help strengthen, promote and safeguard the French language in Canada, not only in Quebec, but especially in northern Ontario and across the country. French is always in a very precarious situation. We must make a deliberate effort to support French across Canada. I hope that this will bear fruit and that the French fact will thrive outside Quebec for centuries to come.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, in 1992, the Charlottetown accord failed. Nevertheless, the text of the Charlottetown accord was approved by the House of Commons. The text stated that Quebec would never have less than

25% of the total number of seats in the House of Commons. That is what part of our motion today is based on.

Does that mean that the House, by rejecting this part of our motion, also rejects its 1992 decision?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I have great respect for my friend from Beauport—Limoilou, but I would like to ask her a question.

I imagine she was always a great supporter of the Bloc Québécois, which was founded in 1990. How did she vote in the 1992 referendum? What was the Bloc's official position on that referendum?

I myself voted "yes" in the referendum, but I am certain that many of the members of the Bloc urged Quebecers to vote "no". There needs to be a little consistency between the positions adopted in 1992 and those adopted today.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments about the importance of immigration. Immigration has been very important to my home province of Manitoba. Through the provincial nominee program, we have noticed a great increase in overall numbers. We developed part of the program to ensure that our francophone community would continue to grow.

I would ask the member to provide his thoughts on how immigration can ensure healthy francophone communities, not only in the province of Quebec, but also across Canada. Could he comment on how there is always a need for international workers and that it is important for French to be considered in that, too?

• (1105)

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer the question asked by my friend from Winnipeg North.

I agree with him wholeheartedly. Immigration is truly an extraordinary tool for our culture, our demographic growth and our economic development.

As they say, more immigration is always good news. When immigrants arrive here, they create jobs, use fewer social services, establish companies and help diversify our culture.

Immigration is extremely important, especially for the francophone community in Manitoba. I also know that Franco-Ontarians were able to maintain their demographic weight thanks to immigration. Consequently, we need to do more to encourage immigration.

I hope that I can convince my colleagues from Quebec to support me in this effort to increase francophone immigration levels in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

I am pleased to be joining the debate on this motion. I would have much loved to have been there, but members can probably hear that I sound a bit ill. I have a cold, so I cannot fly there and take part in this debate in person.

I want to outline to my constituents, Albertans, westerners and Canadians how the process works. There is a Yiddish proverb, but I need to introduce how this is going to work first. The Constitution in Canada requires a redistribution of seats every 10 years. This is done based on the political weight of the various provinces. Statistics Canada produces a census. That census was released in February with the data within it.

I have two interesting data points I want to note. As an Albertan, I represent the second largest riding by population size in Canada with 163,447 people living here. Many members will know that number is 40% bigger than what the original quotient average was intended to be. My colleague for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin represents 209,431 people in his riding, which is double the number of what an average riding in Canada should have. With that comes double the case files, double the emails and double the phone calls. Essentially it is double everything with the same resources and the same person to represent them all.

That is the life of an urban Calgary MP. Edmonton—Wetaskiwin happens to be one of those rare “rurban” ridings. It is both a rural county and the city of Edmonton, which is slowly growing into the county as it builds brand new suburbs, which can be seen when driving north on Highway 2. That is the challenge of an urban MP.

Then we have the challenges of rural MPs. Those ridings have perhaps fewer people in them, but they have more mayors, more city councillors, more local clubs. Members might be surprised to know that, up until very recently, I did not even have a high school in my riding. Up until 2018, I had no high school in my riding in the city of Calgary. I know that is shocking, but it is not the case for rural MPs. They may have three, four, five, six high schools depending on how big the counties are and which areas they go into. Sometimes small towns have basically everything from kindergarten all the way to grade 11 or grade 12, just in their riding. That brings its own challenges in representation.

When we do the redistribution of the Constitution every 10 years, it is based purely on demographic weight, not political weight, all across Canada. There are four rules that are followed when we do redistributions in Canada. As I said, I have a Yiddish proverb, “Don’t give me the honey and spare me the sting”.

We are westerners, and both of us represent provinces which are under-represented. The honey to us would be to have more seats, and Alberta is looking at three seats in this redistribution. The sting comes with the fact that every redistribution makes lots of people unhappy. There is always the case that not everybody gets everything that they would like based on the formula.

Let us talk about the formula that was used. The formula was passed in 2011 and received royal assent in 2012. It is called the Fair Representation Act. It basically acknowledged the fact that the fastest-growing provinces in Canada were not gaining enough seats to ensure representation by population. Those three provinces namely were Ontario, British Columbia and my home province of

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Alberta. In this redistribution, the goal was to ensure that they would catch up in effect. That is why in 2015 we saw the addition of 30 new ridings. It was to try to get closer to what is called “rep by pop” and get closer to the representation that is mandated by the Constitution.

In this redistribution, the electoral quotient being used by Elections Canada is 121,891. Of course, there will be some back and forth available here in order to ensure that the smaller towns, counties and regions are well represented and to reduce to the minimal amount possible the distance MPs have to drive to represent their constituents.

In Canada there are four rules. The first is a quotient that is used by Elections Canada to determine how many seats per riding should be available. We then apply the senatorial clause, so no province can have fewer members of Parliament than it has senators in the Senate of Canada, that other place. Then we apply the grandfathering clause. In 1985, we basically agreed that no province should lose a seat based on what it had in 1985. There are slower-growing provinces. Today this primarily impacts Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Finally, in 2011-12, we added the representation rule specifically applied to the province of Quebec in order to ensure that it would always have representation by population.

● (1110)

I will note that in this redistribution, the population of Quebec, according to Statistics Canada is 22.57% and 22.71% will be the seat count. It is trying to reach that goal of getting to an apportionment representation by population in that particular situation.

We have heard some of the challenges that exist in representing very large ridings and representing urban ridings, and the overall challenge of representation as a member of Parliament. I think it is very challenging. Every single formula we agree to at any point will have winners and losers in it, and we are always trying to go for that win-win.

In preparing for this debate, I went back to the debates that happened originally in 2011 and 2012 on this particular subject of how we could ensure that we did not just keep increasing the number of MPs, as other Westminster parliaments have done, because we have these rules we have agreed to over the last 40 or 50 years. However, it is always stinging when we have these changes that can happen based on a formula.

It is hard to predict what is going to happen just a few weeks from now. It is hard to predict what will happen 10 years from now. Economics bears a great deal of weight on how population movement happens in Canada. My home province of Alberta had a boom in the early 2000s that attracted an enormous number of people to our home province, who settled there and brought their families. We built schools and highways and everything. It was a very attractive point for people to move there, so our population grew incredibly quickly.

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That is the case for British Columbia today. It is still the case for Ontario. The number one destination for a lot of people who come to Canada remains our major cities, and the biggest city in Canada is Toronto and the greater Toronto region, which continues to attract so many people because of the job opportunities and the economic opportunities it provides. It is also a great place to live, work and play, which I would say all of Canada is. We are in the greatest country in the world, and we should cherish that and make sure that whatever we do here addresses those points and continues that for future generations.

In section (b) of the motion the Bloc has proposed, it does not really propose a solution. There is no real solution here for how to fix the problem the Bloc members have identified. They say “political weight”, but I would read into it as preferably “democratic weight”, and it would apply to only one province. However, the second part of the motion does not offer a formula solution, and the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which is this independent commission, is already working.

It has already started its work. It has a website we can go to. There are actually commission reports. The commission has already started its work. It is already working, so essentially what the Bloc is asking here is to change the rules of the game once the game has already started, and it would be difficult to direct the commission to change it. I think it is still pretty early in the process. I do not think it is impossible, but we should recognize that since October the commissioners have been appointed and they have been holding consultation meetings already. By August, at the latest, they are supposed to write back and publicly disclose the maps that would be used for the next redistribution, hopefully in time for the next federal election.

However, if we go to the Elections Canada's website and the electoral boundaries commission's website, it is saying these changes may not be in place until April 1, 2024. This is a minority Parliament; let us recognize that. The last time a Parliament took it upon itself to discuss this, it was the 2008 to 2011 Parliament, and it was not able to finish it then, which is why it was passed in 2012.

I wanted to lay that out. There is a good logical case to be made that no province should be made worse off after redistribution, but we have this formula, a formula that received royal assent in 2012. It is the 11th hour, so to speak, and I know it is stinging for those who believe that no province should lose a seat. We have different constitutional rules and conventions in place to ensure that does not happen.

I will be happy to take questions and to continue this debate with colleagues in the chamber.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wonder whether my colleague recognizes that Canada is a federation and that it is a contract, not a nation.

It is a contract reached initially between two nations, the French nation and the English nation. I am not ignoring the indigenous nations that were already on the territory, or the many other nations that joined us afterwards at different times and through different

means. In the beginning, the Canadian federation was made up of two nations.

Does my colleague not recognize that, because of this, we need to maintain the viability of the two nations in the federation, if we do not want to confront Quebec's fight for independence, which has long been on the table?

We do not want to cease to exist, and we wanted to be members of the federation. I personally never wanted it, but that is another story. At a certain point in time, we believed that we wanted to be members of the federation, and being members means preserving our identity.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord for his question.

Canada was founded as a binational and bicultural country. The two founding peoples of our country were the francophone and the anglophone peoples. As my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord knows, I am a Franco-Albertan, but I am also a child of Bill 101. I lived in Montreal for a while.

I think we need to recognize that it is not in the House of Commons that we should be deciding how well we are doing and where the Quebec people and the Quebec nation stand. I completely agree with that. In fact, I always say that Albertans are a distinct society according to the description in the Lake Meech and Charlottetown accords.

This is not the first time I am saying this, but we must admit that culture is much more than representation in the House of Commons. The same is true for the francophone fact in Canada. We must recognize that many francophones outside Quebec represent our country's linguistic and cultural duality.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think it is so profound that we are discussing our democracy in Canada, the voices we can have and who should be at the table as we watch the horrific violence being perpetrated against the democratic people of Ukraine by Putin in Russia. It reminds us in this House how precious and fragile democracy is.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about this historic moment in our nation and around the world, where we have come together to say that the violence that is being perpetrated against the Ukrainian people must be fought at every level. Canada has to have a coherent plan in order to support the people of Ukraine, support refugees, support democracy and ensure that Russia pays a serious price for this attack on the democratic rights of an independent nation.

• (1120)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I am not sure how that is related to the redistribution of seats in Canada. However, I will thank the member for Timmins—James Bay. He does not have to tell a Canadian of Polish heritage, someone who was born behind the iron curtain as the son of a member of the Solidarnosc movement, about the behaviour, aggressiveness and military aggression capable by the Kremlin.

Absolutely, he is entirely correct. We should be standing with Ukrainians. We should stand with the government in Kyiv, in defending their democracy and defending their institutions. They have a millennial-long history of being in this region and we should stand with them in this moment, just as many eastern Europeans have done in the region by lending aid, lending help, lending support and providing havens for those fleeing the conflict.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the things we have learned through the census released by Statistics Canada was that, in good part, our future population growth is going to be through immigration.

Can the member provide his thoughts on using the immigration policy as one of those tools to enable our provinces to be able to continue to promote culture and heritage?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North is correct that immigration, historically for the last 150 years, has been the main driver of demographic growth in Canada. In successive waves, we have seen immigrants from eastern Europe add to the mixing pot that is Canada and add to its distinctiveness. I am one of those people and so is my family, who came from different regions and settled in Canada.

Absolutely, he is correct, but I think the issue at hand is how we fairly represent people all across Canada and ensure members of Parliament are able to do their work.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would first like to reiterate the Conservative Party's support for the people of Ukraine. I think this is an extremely dark period in our history. People who were living in happiness just yesterday are living in fear today. I think it is important that we take every opportunity to support these people, salute their courage in resisting Putin's invasion, and let them know that all Canadians are behind them.

We are here to discuss democracy in Canada and how Canadians are represented in the House of Commons. This opportunity was given to us by the Bloc Québécois motion that we are debating. The federal electoral map is revised every 10 years, and each time, it challenges many of our preconceived ideas. We must have these discussions, but we must also use each one as an opportunity to remind ourselves of the importance of the role of members in the House of Commons.

By way of background, Elections Canada has estimated that the number of MPs from Quebec should drop from 78 seats to 77 in 2024. Conversely, Ontario and British Columbia would each gain a seat, while Alberta would gain three.

I want to put partisan politics aside and speak about the role of an MP. Losing a member of Parliament, from any province or region, has negative consequences for the constituents, especially in rural regions, and rural areas are the ones most likely to see their riding disappear.

Canadians are looking for answers to their questions and concerns every day. Many are frustrated about the lack of information from different departments. On top of that, the government can be

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slow to respond, especially over the past two years during the COVID-19 crisis, when no one knew where to turn. The members here in the House of Commons have offices that often fielded calls from constituents asking for help understanding the many measures announced by various governments during that time.

Naturally, people turned to their members of Parliament. In many cases, the MP's office was the constituent's only way to connect with the government, because there came a point where they just could not get an answer. Our MPs therefore took over for the government when it was not able to provide answers quickly. This very important connection between constituents and their MPs could be more difficult to maintain if there are no standards to ensure that people living in rural areas can maintain meaningful access to their MP.

As the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, I obviously do not represent as many constituents as a member from a Montreal riding. However, my riding is 500 times bigger and contains 50 municipalities. That means 50 mayors, 50 municipal councils, hundreds of social clubs or even seniors' groups, not to mention dozens of chambers of commerce, business associations, agricultural associations and so on.

How can one MP have conversations with 50 or more mayors and find time to meet them all? Even if that MP met with just one town council per month—because they all meet around the same time—it would be impossible to meet with all of them over the course of a four-year term in office. There are not enough months. Four years is 48 months, and I have 50 municipalities. If I want to see each municipal council, it is just not possible over the course of a single mandate.

Fortunately, we now have Zoom and digital tools that enable us to meet with more people at the same time, but nothing is quite like meeting face to face, connecting with people and having real conversations with the folks we represent. How are we supposed to make sure development and infrastructure projects are moving forward? How are we supposed to cope with the challenge of fitting all that in, doing all that work?

The answer is self-evident. My riding is not the only one like this. Many of my colleagues are in exactly the same position with their ridings.

● (1125)

Electoral redistribution could reshape these ridings, making them even larger to cover, which will limit Canadians' access to their MPs and to federal government services.

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MPs are actually a bit like family doctors in the sense that, when they have too many patients, it is hard to get an appointment. The more constituents and territory MPs have to cover, the harder it is for them to hear their constituents' concerns. It is also harder for citizens to access their MPs, the government or the House of Commons to make their wishes known. Quebecers from the regions, especially those from rural Quebec, also deserve to maintain their political weight in Ottawa, as do rural Canadians across the country.

I worry about how the people in my riding and in the regions of Quebec and Canada will be affected by electoral redistribution. If we reduce the number of MPs, people will no longer be able to make their voices heard as much as in the past. For the sake of members' representation and work in rural constituencies, the Prime Minister needs to consider rural Canada and Quebec in his criteria.

Any change to the electoral map that does not take into account the geography, demographics or needs of the local population is, in my opinion, doomed to diminish Canadian democracy. Any redistribution that does not take into account the regional reality is also condemned to change our democratic life. At the risk of repeating myself, the proposed redistribution will reduce the weight of rural regions. They will be less represented than urban ridings.

I will make a comparison. A member of Parliament from a city is no better than a member from a rural region. The work is simply different. People who live in a major city may have access to the office of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, because that department has an office in their town. Residents will not go to their MP with questions. They will go to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. When there are too many problems, they will end up going to the MP, but the first point of contact with the government for people who live in big cities is often the government offices that are there.

There are no federal immigration or transportation offices in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable. Such offices do not exist. The only gateway for accessing federal services is the MP's office, so we get a very high volume of calls. I understand that our job is not to represent the government in our ridings, but when people have questions for the federal government and do not have direct access to the government in their riding, they go through their MP. That is the reality of the current situation.

The Prime Minister can decide to maintain the number of seats in every riding if he wants to. He can choose not to reduce the number of seats as part of the electoral redistribution that is currently under way. I think the Prime Minister should take what I am saying into consideration. No province should have to lose a seat in any scenario. If that happens today, then it could happen again in 10 or 20 years, and who knows which provinces will be affected by this situation next.

Quebec is not the only province affected. There are four other provinces whose representative weight is greater than their demographic weight. They are Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. This is food for thought.

We need to maintain the representation of the regions in Parliament so that the voices of all Canadians, no matter who they are,

can continue to be heard by their MP. That is the right thing to do, both to protect rural areas and to preserve the uniqueness of Quebec as a nation within Canada.

I sincerely believe that, right now, the Prime Minister has an opportunity to do the right thing. He can decide not to reduce the number of MPs in Quebec from 78 to 77, while still giving other provinces more MPs so they are better represented.

• (1130)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, and I have a really simple question for him.

This Bloc Québécois motion and the bill that will accompany it are about doing something major for Quebec. It is not about recognition based on demographics alone, because the demographic situation could change. For example, in terms of demographics, the two provinces with the highest aging populations are Ontario and Quebec, a fact that is not even taken into account in health care funding, by the way.

It is more a question of political weight. Quebec has been recognized as a distinct society and as a nation.

Do Quebec's political weight and representation in the House deserve to be maintained or even increased?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Again, I think it is important to understand that a redistribution proposal that takes seats away from any province will have negative effects on the representation of voters in that province.

Therefore, we must consider all the factors, such as Quebec's specific character, Quebec's nationhood, demographic weight, the political weight of each province, and Canada's changing demographics. I think all these factors need to be considered when it comes time to redraw the electoral map, but I especially believe that we must never downgrade a province's representation. That is important.

We will have the opportunity to discuss this in the coming weeks and to comment on this issue during the consultation being launched by Elections Canada. However, I remind the House that the Prime Minister could say right now that he is going to maintain the number of seats in Quebec at 78, and that is what we are asking him to do.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made a great deal of reference to rural versus urban. With regard to the current number of seats in the province of Quebec, is he suggesting the numbers are wrong for the 78 seats in the current makeup for rural and urban components, for the city of Montreal versus rural communities? Is he saying that is currently a wrong formula? I would like to hear his thoughts on that distribution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

What I am saying is that it is much more difficult to have enough residents to reach the Elections Canada targets in a rural area. Municipalities must be added. For example, we would have to go from 50 to 75 municipalities to strike a balance. What I am asking is for Canada's rural reality to be considered. Our country is the second largest in the world. It would be appropriate for our standards and rules to take this into consideration and for us to ensure that citizens are represented.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, and I would like to ask him a question.

Quebec's political weight is already part of the criteria that must be met in order for Quebec to be brought back into the Constitution, in particular as part of the Charlottetown accord, which guaranteed that Quebec would never have less than 25% of the total number of seats in the House of Commons. This agreement was negotiated by a Conservative government.

As the deputy leader of the Conservative Party, would it not make sense for the member to defend this position, which was put forward by his own government?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I believe that the government must keep a minimum of 78 Quebec members in the House of Commons to ensure representation, and that it must also take into account the demographic reality. As for the recognition of nationhood, that is an issue we must continue to debate, and it is one that Quebecers and MPs will always continue to debate.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this important debate. I will be sharing my time with my wonderful colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, who will have some very interesting things to say. I look forward to hearing him.

Like many of my colleagues in the House, I would like to take a few moments to express our solidarity with the Ukrainian people who have been living through very dark days for almost a week. They have been suffering a brutal assault by a dictator, Vladimir Putin. I feel especially concerned, as the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, since my riding is the area in Montreal where there

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is the Parc de l'Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Basilica and the Ukrainian Festival every year, which I attend with Quebecers and Montrealers of Ukrainian origin. We are all very shaken. We are here to support Ukrainians as well as to support the peace process.

Today's debate is important because it brings up the question of Quebec's place in the federation and Quebec's signing of the Constitution, as well as Quebec's political weight in the House and in Parliament. I will come back to that a little later.

This raises fundamental questions about democracy and the equality of citizens. We are lucky enough to live in a democratic system in which people express themselves because of a notion of popular sovereignty that leaves it up to the people to decide. We must respect the equality of people, of men and women. The notion of democracy stems from the principle that human beings are born free and equal in rights.

The democratic notion of equality—one citizen, one vote—is not always observed in a certain sense, sometimes for the wrong reasons, but sometimes for the right ones. We tend to forget the bad reasons because we are all too often used to them, unfortunately. Our electoral system is designed so that not all votes are equal. Some votes are lost or do not count in a first-past-the-post system like ours, rather than in a proportional system. Many votes do not make it to Parliament and do not get expressed.

I will use Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie as an example. Last fall, there was a general election. I was lucky enough to be re-elected for a fourth time, but with just under 50% of the votes, 49%, to be exact. This means that 50% of the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie did not vote for the NDP. Are these people represented in the House of Commons? Hopefully, their vote was taken up elsewhere in other ridings.

Since members can be elected with 35% or 40% of the votes, the majority of citizens who voted in an election are often not represented by the members sitting here, in the House. This is becoming more common and, very often—this is practically the rule—we end up with a government that represents a minority of citizens who voted for it. A party can win an election with 37% or 38% of the vote and have a majority government with 65% of the seats in the House and impose its views on Parliament for four years.

If we had a proportional system, if the Liberals had kept their promise and changed the electoral system as they promised in 2015, we might not be where we are today. There have even been situations in our history, on a number of occasions, where the party with the most votes did not form the government. The party that came second, based on the total number of votes, had the majority of the seats. This is an absurd democratic contradiction. I do not understand why the Conservative Party does not get more worked up; the Conservatives got more votes than the Liberals in the last two elections and yet they are in opposition, instead of forming the government. That does not seem to bother them. We in the NDP are troubled by this because it touches on a fundamental issue, the equality of citizens.

Business of Supply

There may be good reasons for not observing that equality of votes. The electoral system is a very bad reason, because it could be changed quite easily. Most democracies in the world have done so. However, there are good reasons. There are criteria we can use to decide how and when people will be represented.

● (1140)

As mentioned earlier in this debate, certain criteria already exist in our system. For example, we have to evaluate a number of things. Some of my colleagues from the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have mentioned the senatorial clause, which ensures that Prince Edward Island, for example, cannot have fewer MPs than it has senators. In fact, that was a condition for its entry into Confederation. There is the grandfathering clause that applies to certain provinces; this has also come up. Finally, we have the territorial clause, which says that the territories must be represented even though they have far fewer constituents than more densely populated ridings like mine. I must also point out that Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is a tiny riding, but 110,000 people live there. That is a lot of people per square kilometre. The territories should have their own MPs even though they have less than half that population spread over a huge area often as big as a number of European countries. These MPs also represent indigenous and Inuit communities, who must be represented to have a voice in the House.

All these criteria need to be examined, which is perfectly normal. That is why an automatic demographic formula is not applied as a basic mathematical rule, but rather a series of exceptions. More criteria are applied, and sometimes for very good reasons.

This system of accommodation means that we can and we must have this kind of discussion, which was brought about by today's motion.

I will refrain from giving a long history lesson and going back to Upper and Lower Canada, but let us not forget that Quebec did not sign the Constitution of 1982. That is problematic. I am very proud of my party leader, who said at a federal NDP convention that that was a historic mistake, which must be resolved one day, one way or another. That said, attempts have been made to heal the scars, the wounds inflicted on René Lévesque and the entire Quebec population. There were two attempts during my teenage years, just as I was beginning to take an interest in politics. There was the Meech Lake Accord attempt between 1987 and 1990, which was rejected, and the Charlottetown Accord that was negotiated afterwards.

I will not rehash all of Quebec's historical claims and the criteria. There are a number of them, and they are not all mutually exclusive. However, one of the considerations in the Charlottetown Accord was Quebec's political weight in Parliament, which was set at 25%. This was negotiated by the Conservative government of then prime minister Brian Mulroney. This agreement was approved by my party, the NDP. This is nothing new. The issue of Quebec's political weight in the House should not be seen as something original or new. There are precedents that were negotiated by the Conservatives and supported by the NDP. I think that this needs to be part of our debate on this motion.

Since the House formally recognized Quebec as a nation, I think that we could have a Quebec clause recognizing that Quebec is a nation and that, as a result, like other Senate provisions, territorial

provisions or grandfathering provisions, could be applied to the distribution of seats and that this would not come at the expense of the representation of other provinces. Since Parliament recognized that Quebec is a nation, and that Quebecers or French Canadians were one of the two founding peoples, then this needs to be meaningfully expressed and have an impact. It would make sense that a Quebec provision—I am not saying it would be the only one—would be one of them.

As a proud Quebecer, I will be pleased to support this motion. I would not want to support the political undermining of Quebec.

● (1145)

I hope that my Liberal and Conservative colleagues in Quebec feel the same way. Immigration is an important and necessary tool to maintain Quebec's demographic weight, but there are also other ways to do it, and this one would be very effective.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his speech. It is clear that he has a great deal of love for Quebec and the Quebec nation. I heard him refer to a Quebec clause.

I am the sponsor of a bill introduced by my party, Bill C-246, which also focuses on Quebec's political weight and proposes a nation provision that seeks to preserve, as the motion we are moving today in the House of Commons does, Quebec's political weight within the Canadian federation until such time that Quebec takes a decision on its future.

I would like to know whether my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has read Bill C-246, which I introduced a few weeks ago, and whether he recognizes the nation provision to be the same as the Quebec clause he proposes in his speech.

I would also like to take this opportunity to ask him whether he will or will not approve and support the bill.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond. I always enjoy having these types of discussions with him. This sometimes turns into debate, but it never really escalates.

His bill is indeed very interesting. It is totally logical and consistent with the point of view I just expressed, in other words, that there are many criteria for establishing the representation of citizens in the House.

His bill, in principle, is interesting. It remains to be seen what amendments might be made, the details of the terms, and, if ever it gets to third reading after review in committee, what the final version will look like. At that point I will be able to make an informed decision with all of my NDP colleagues and the caucus, along with our leader.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the things I indicated earlier was that, according to Canada's census, if we take a look at the last decade, we see that Canada's future growth will be very much dependent on immigration to Canada. If we look at our democratic country and the principles within it, there is no doubt that the population does matter.

I wonder if the hon. member could provide his thoughts with regard to whether the ongoing growth in Canada's population is going to be in good part sustained through immigration. Does he have any thoughts with respect to that?

• (1150)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I believe I was quite clear in my speech. The equality of citizens is clearly a basic principle of democracy, but the demographic formula is not the only one we use. There are several others. We have shown that. This has consequences for the Prairies, the Maritimes, and Quebec as well. We can consider this discussion because we live under a system that has multiple criteria and exceptions.

As for immigration, I would say that Quebec and Canada are countries of immigrants. We are all to varying degrees sons and daughters of immigrants, except for the indigenous peoples and the Inuit.

I would like to see Quebec welcome more immigrants. I think that is also a good way to solve the problem of the labour shortage. However, at this time, the Government of Quebec makes decisions about economic immigration, as it should. It is up to Quebec to decide.

Personally, I believe that a good part of the solution to Quebec's political weight is demographics and immigration. It would also help solve the labour shortage.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was very interested in the speech given by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He spoke a bit about all the work that the NDP has been doing in the House for a long time to ensure that Quebec is properly represented.

A bill introduced in 2012 and sponsored by the NDP member for Compton—Stanstead at the time proposed that Quebec be given this threshold. It was something already in place for many provinces and territories.

Could my colleague for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie comment on the work done by the NDP since then to ensure that Quebec has its place here in the House of Commons?

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Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby for his question.

I have been a member of Parliament for nearly 11 years now, and in my experience, the NDP has always been focused on Quebec and its place, on respect for the Quebec nation, and on protecting the French language both in and outside Quebec.

The 2012 bill reflects that. Our party also adopted the Sherbrooke declaration, which recognizes the Quebec nation and asymmetrical federalism.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the motion, as I previously said.

Like many others who have spoken today, I am extremely sad about the events happening, not here in the House or in Ottawa, but on the other side of the world, in Ukraine. Ukrainian civilians are being massacred by the missiles raining down on them, and their cities are under heavy bombardment. As my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie said, it is with a heavy heart that I, along with everyone else, see these massacres, the likes of which Europe has not seen in more than a century. We thought they would never happen again.

Our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine and its soldiers. We hope that the dictator responsible for this tragedy and all of this suffering, as well as those around him, will see that what is happening in Ukraine is horrific and will immediately call off this invasion. That is what we all want to see, and Canada is doing its part.

To get back to the motion we are debating in the House today, the idea of a threshold for Quebec just makes sense. I have said this many times. The idea that Quebec's presence in the House requires that it not lose any seats is normal. These thresholds already exist, as I mentioned earlier. In fact, the territories and New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba and Saskatchewan all have thresholds that ensure that they will not lose any seats. If that had not been the case, we might be discussing the loss of seats in Saskatchewan.

The NDP fully supports these thresholds to ensure the preservation of this representation, which is so important for our democracy. With respect to today's motion, it only makes sense that Quebec have such a threshold for minimum representation in order to ensure that it will always have the same weight in the House and not lose seats. That is normal.

I represent British Columbia, and I would like that province to have more seats, which will likely be the case after the most recent census. British Columbia and Alberta, which are the most under-represented provinces, will receive additional seats. However, in our opinion, that should not mean that other regions of the country should lose seats.

That is the reason why the NDP supports the motion. When we look at what is currently in place for our population, these long-standing traditions are important.

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In Atlantic Canada, which is significantly overrepresented, there is one federal MP for every 39,000 inhabitants in Prince Edward Island. New Brunswick has one MP for every 79,000 people. Newfoundland and Labrador has one MP for every 74,000 inhabitants. Nova Scotia has one MP for every 88,000 people.

I will not get into the exceptions that apply to the territories, since the territories are immense and they are extremely well represented. I am thinking here about my colleague, the hon. member for Nunavut, who does extraordinary work in a riding covering an area larger than most countries on Earth. She does her job so well. She is extraordinary, and works tirelessly for her constituents in Nunavut.

• (1155)

Other provinces have also had an exemption. For example, in Manitoba, there is one MP for every 98,000 people and, in Saskatchewan, one for every 84,000 people. In Quebec right now there is one MP for every 109,000 people. In Ontario, there is one for every 123,000 people. In British Columbia, there is one MP for every 125,000 people. Lastly, in Alberta, there is one for every 130,000 people. As members can see, this should be looked at. We make adjustments every 10 years based on the census.

The threshold principle already exists. The motion presented today only makes sense. The current exceptions pertain to much lower thresholds than what we are talking about today with the motion. That is why it only makes sense, and that is why we will be supporting the motion.

The other reason has to do with history. I came to the House in 2004 with Jack Layton's team. As a New Democrat, I am very proud of our history, not only for our efforts to ensure a place for the Quebec nation in Canada and the Canadian federation, but also for the work the NDP has done, differently from all other parties in Canada, to ensure the survival of the French fact in Canada.

As everyone knows, I represent British Columbia, one of the provinces where the number of francophones is constantly increasing. Many people from francophone countries immigrate to British Columbia. In addition, the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique can attest to the presence of a very dynamic network of French-speaking merchants. British Columbia also has a network of school boards, which includes dozens of French-language schools. I want to say that this was put in place by an NDP government.

In British Columbia, as in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, it was NDP governments that opened the door to ensuring French-language education for all francophone students in the province. We are proud of that legacy. The NDP does not say one thing when it is in Ottawa and another when it is in New Westminster, Winnipeg or Saskatoon. We are consistent with our values when it comes to strengthening official languages across the country. That is what NDP governments have done everywhere they have been and everywhere they are.

Léo Piquette, Elizabeth Weir and Alexa McDonough, New Democrats in other provinces, have also advanced the cause of equality of both official languages. No matter where they are in the

country, New Democrats have always been there to strengthen the official languages and the French fact.

The legacy of the New Democrats is different from that of the Liberals or Conservatives, who always talk about strengthening the official languages when they are in Ottawa, but change their minds when they return to their regions. The NDP is consistent; it has values and principles. We are very proud to have maintained these principles for many years.

As I said before, today's motion only makes sense.

My question is for the Liberals and Conservatives. When the NDP tabled this bill 10 years ago, the Liberals and Conservatives opposed it, despite the fact that the Liberals support the principle of a threshold for Atlantic Canada and the Conservatives support the same principle for Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

We have to be logical and consistent. That is why we will vote in favour of the motion.

• (1200)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby for his speech.

I am thanking him now because, as of this morning, he seems to be in agreement with our motion on this opposition day. I assume that the New Democrats will vote in favour of the motion. That is interesting, but I would like to take this further.

When we talk about Quebec's political weight, it is important to truly recognize the fact that Quebec is a nation. My colleague spoke a lot about the Liberals and Conservatives. As we know, in 2006, the Conservatives passed a motion recognizing the Quebec nation, but they have done nothing since then. No concrete action was taken by the Conservatives to follow up on the recognition of the Quebec nation.

I would like to know how far my colleague is prepared to go to recognize the Quebec nation. Should the government go as far as to implement standards virtually everywhere and to interfere in certain jurisdictions? How far is he prepared to go to recognize the Quebec nation?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

She already knows the answer, since she has certainly read the Sherbrooke declaration. In this declaration, the NDP proposed a truly promising future for all Quebecers and Canadians. The declaration presents an important vision that would allow for the possibility of Quebec receiving compensation from the federal government to establish programs, in its areas of jurisdiction, that Quebecers want. That has been a guiding principle since the NDP's agreement.

We are also strengthening the French fact in Canada. NDP governments have always strengthened the French fact, no matter where they are in Canada. We can see it in British Columbia, Yukon, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario. Regardless of the province or territory, NDP governments have always strengthened the French fact in Canada.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the member's last comment in regard to the French language being spoken in Canada.

I believe that, in Manitoba, there are more people who can speak French today than in the history of the province, and I think it is because of strong, national policy supported and enhanced by provincial jurisdictions. Also, as a member of Parliament for Manitoba, I have a great deal of passion for the province of Quebec. There are things that we have in common, such as a strong, healthy aerospace industry. Supporting the province of Quebec does not necessarily mean that one has to be a member of Parliament representing the province of Quebec, or vice versa. Could the member provide his thoughts on that?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would love to share my thoughts on that.

This is where I disagree profoundly with the Bloc Québécois, because Bloc members will never recognize the existence of a vibrant francophone sector outside of Quebec. They have never stood up for Acadians, they have never stood up for Franco-Columbians, and they have never stood up for francophones in western Canada.

As the member knows, in British Columbia, we are seeing the number of francophones increasing. I had the pleasure of participating in so many francophone events, and I see the incredible vitality of the francophone community in British Columbia. We are seeing more and more schools and institutions, as well. These are all good things.

We all need to work together to reinforce our official languages and reinforce the francophone community right across the country. That is something, tragically, that the Bloc will never want to do. It is unfortunate, but we have that responsibility. Of course, the NDP's consistency over the years is something that we hope both Liberals and Conservatives will learn from. We would like to work together to make this country even better.

[Translation]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's speech, and I wanted to ask him how a mixed member proportional system of representation would protect Quebec and regional and cultural representation.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from London—Fanshawe for her excellent French, and thank her for her excellent question.

It is important. That is something the NDP is fighting for and has been working on for a long time, namely implementing a system where everyone is truly represented. That would completely change the situation for people who vote for the NDP in Quebec, for example. They would be represented by several MPs, because of the large number of voters. That way, people's votes would count, regardless of where in Canada they live. That is something the NDP continues to work on.

I once again thank the hon. member for her question.

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Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I am scolded for forgetting to inform you, I would like to say that I intend to share my time with my esteemed and excellent colleague from Jonquière.

With respect to today's motion, I will be very honest and start with a confession. Initially, I wondered why it would not be normal that Quebec would lose a seat, since it seemed logical to me, given our smaller demographic weight. That was what I first thought, instinctively. However, at some point, we start asking ourselves questions and digging a bit deeper, and that is exactly what these debates in the House are for.

I wondered why it would be justifiable for Quebec to demand a number of seats that is not equivalent to its demographic weight. The first observation we can make is that, basically, the formula used to calculate the number of seats in Quebec is not purely mathematical. There are three examples of this.

First, there is the senatorial clause. This clause ensures that no province will have fewer members of Parliament than senators. It ensures four seats for Prince Edward Island even though, technically, because of its population, it should have only one.

Second, there is a grandfather clause in the current formula that ensures that no province can have fewer members after a future redistribution than it had in 1985, which is why the Maritimes and Saskatchewan have kept their seats.

Third, there is a clause for the territories that allows each of them one MP even though, technically, the total population of the territories would warrant only one MP for all of them combined.

Since we are already working outside the scope of a purely mathematical framework, we are wondering whether there is a clause that would allow Quebec to claim a number of seats that is not equivalent to its demographic weight. The answer is no, and that is precisely the problem we are trying to remedy today.

Some may be wondering why we are doing this. Our history books show that, when Canada was created, it had two founding peoples. Last October, we marked the very sad anniversary of the creation of Canada's multiculturalism policy in 1971. In somewhat more recent history, the government started dismissing the notion of founding peoples, which had given Quebec some pre-eminence, and replaced it with Canada's much-touted multiculturalism. Biculturalism was shoved aside by multiculturalism, which muddled the waters and suddenly made Quebec a little less prominent on the map of Canada.

Since history always repeats itself to some extent, in 1995, Jean Chrétien's government recognized that Quebec was a distinct society. We are not sure why, but it may have had something to do with the fact that Canada nearly lost a referendum a few months earlier. All of a sudden, Quebec was being recognized as a distinct society. The Bloc Québécois's response was that this was just a mirage. I would like to quote what Lucien Bouchard said in debate the day this resolution was adopted. He said, and I quote:

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...from Meech 1 to Meech 2 and from Meech 2 to Charlottetown, Quebec was always offered less and less. Maybe they offered a little less each time because they were tired by their previous effort....How can the Prime Minister think that Quebecers will be pleased to hear him say that he recognizes the fact that they are a distinct society? How can he think that this will make us, Quebecers, happy? We certainly know that we are a distinct society and we have known it for quite some time. What we want is the means to make our own decisions, to plan Quebec's future based on our differences. That is what we want, but we are not getting it. There is nothing to that effect in the resolution.

In 2006, it was déjà vu all over again. The Harper government recognized Quebec as a nation. I thought it might be fun to see what Wikipedia had to say about that, and indeed, there is a page on the subject. It is very interesting. At the top, it reads:

It is important to note that this motion is symbolic because it does not amend the Constitution Act, 1867, which states that Quebec is one of Canada's provinces. In addition, it was not endorsed by the Senate, the federal Parliament's second house. There has been very little interest in constitutional amendments since the failure of the Meech Lake accord, and politicians find themselves in a situation where all they can do is issue symbolic declarations.

I will expand on the symbolic nature of these recognitions shortly.

Just last June, the Bloc Québécois got the following motion passed in the House of Commons:

• (1210)

That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

Back then, we reiterated the importance of walking the talk. Being recognized as a nation is not the end of the story, and that is why we are moving today's motion.

I would like to make a brief aside on another subject. Quebec has had its own distinct character for some years on the issue of immigration. The two issues are intrinsically tied together. I will link them at the end of my speech. Quebec shares this jurisdiction with the federal government. Immigration is one of the jurisdictions that fall under both levels of government. For several years now, some of these powers have been decentralized. The first agreements that were signed, such as the Lang-Cloutier agreement in 1971 and the Andras-Bienvenue agreement in 1975, made changes that were more administrative in nature. However, an important first step was already being taken in the area of immigrant selection. For the first time, Canada was forced to consider Quebec's opinion with respect to each new applicant headed for its territory. A little later, in 1979, the Cullen-Couture agreement was signed. In this case, issues involving temporary immigration required discussions between the two levels of government, and that forced them to work together even more. The major breakthrough, when Quebec gained the power to choose a large part of its immigration intake, came from the Canada-Québec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, which was signed by Ms. McDougall and Ms. Gagnon-Tremblay in 1991 and is more commonly known as the Canada-Quebec accord. This document gives Quebec significant powers to welcome people who are able to work. As a result of the agreement, Quebec finally gained full control over the selection process for economic immigrants, as well as powers over integration and francization. In other words, Quebec can determine the entry volumes of these future permanent residents.

One of the reasons we are debating the issue before us today is because it relates to immigration issues, and this has an impact on Quebec's political weight. A few days ago, Paul Journet wrote an article entitled "Quebec is losing its influence". We often debate immigration thresholds in Quebec. People say it should be between 40,000 and 50,000 immigrants. If we compare Quebec with what Canada is doing, we can see that there really is no comparison. Canada is talking about increasing the number of immigrants it will welcome to its territory from 280,000 to 430,000. Proportionately for Quebec, 40,000 or 50,000 immigrants out of 8.5 million inhabitants represents 5% of the population. For Canada, the threshold of 430,000 immigrants suggested by the Liberals out of 38 million people, minus Quebec's 8.5 million, represents about 1.4% of the population. Population growth due to immigration is three times faster in Quebec than in Canada. This is the result of a choice made by Quebec, which wants to ensure the proper francization and integration of its immigrants. English Canada does not face the same constraint, since English is a more internationally recognized and commonly used language. With that in mind, Quebec is justified in wanting to do something not about Canada's choice of immigration thresholds, but about the direct and indirect consequences that Canada's decisions may have on Quebec. That is exactly what the Bloc Québécois motion today is all about. In fact, when a decision by Canada has a negative impact, for example, if the immigration thresholds are increased and there are not enough resources, this has an impact in Quebec on the processing of our files. In this case, we would like to see more money allocated and more civil servants assigned to the processing of these files. It is the same scenario if it causes the demographic weight of Quebec to decrease. We want representation that is proportional to our special status, which is justified. It is not a whim; it is simply a matter of giving concrete expression to what it really means to be a nation.

• (1215)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP supports this motion because it is essential that we maintain a constitutional balance in Canada. It is not only a question of representation. Democracy is based on a balance between the regions and the interests of the different communities. For the NDP, it is essential to preserve and ensure Quebec's voice in the House of Commons.

Does my colleague also believe in the importance of representation for rural regions and other minority regions in Canada?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois prefers not to interfere in the business of others. We are here to represent Quebec's interests. If rural areas want to have this debate and submit a proposal, they should present their arguments and we will debate them. However, I do not believe that is the role of Bloc Québécois members.

• (1220)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to congratulate my colleague from Saint-Jean for her brilliant speech.

Based on the questions we have been hearing since this morning, some of our colleagues seem to have difficulty grasping the difference between Quebec's demographic weight and its political weight. I want to emphasize the fundamental difference.

I would therefore like my colleague to elaborate on this point and on the significance that Quebec's political weight will have in future decisions, in particular with respect to protecting our cultural identity.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I noted this from the very beginning. If we think only of the mathematical aspect, we might think that it is unjustified to demand more of a voice. However, if we look beyond the mathematical aspect and remember that the formula already provides for the recognition of other aspects, it is all the more justifiable to demand more of a voice, especially as francophones, in order to defend our 2% minority status in the English-speaking ocean that is North America.

Unfortunately, in the past, when the Bloc Québécois was not well represented in the House of Commons, the issue was easily disposed of. That is one more reason to have a large number of seats representative of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons, to make sure that we never again get swept under the rug.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague.

I have been listening to my colleagues in the NDP say that we need to give more consideration to francophones outside Quebec and that the Bloc Québécois does not do that. I do not think that is true. On the contrary, I think that it is at the heart of the Bloc Québécois's agenda, since we have always been concerned about the diversity of all francophones in North America.

Would my colleague not agree with me that a strong Quebec, a francophone Quebec nation recognized as such and protected within the Canadian federation, would help these francophone minorities that are not given the weight they deserve in Canada as a whole?

The anglophone minorities in Quebec are well protected. However, the same cannot be said for the francophone minorities in western Canada. The Bloc Québécois knows this and has often stood in the House to say so. In my colleague's opinion, is the recognition that the Bloc Québécois is asking for today not a way of strengthening the influence of francophone communities outside Quebec?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague.

This reminds me of a time in my not so distant youth when I was president of the Parti Québécois's Comité national des jeunes. Some Franco-Ontarians came to see us at the end of a meeting at which we had discussed Quebec independence. They asked us if we often heard the argument that an independent Quebec would forget about the francophone communities outside Quebec. They told us

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not to buy that argument and that, on the contrary, Quebec would serve as a guiding light when making their future demands.

I would also like to come back to a comment that I heard just before, something to the effect that the Bloc Québécois does nothing for francophone communities outside Quebec. However, I spoke just today about immigration and accepting francophone students, the difficulties that we have run into and the battle that we are fighting on this issue. We are doing this not just for Quebec, but also for the benefit of many French-language educational institutions outside Quebec, as was often stated in committee.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have this opportunity to share some thoughts on Quebec's declining political weight.

I can already hear the member for Drummond's snarky comments about the extra weight I am carrying around, but this is not about me. It is about Quebec's political weight.

Quebec's influence is clearly declining in a number of ways. Losing a seat in the House would be one way. That said, there is something else I would like to touch on.

I can see that Quebec is not as influential when I look at the mainstream ideas gaining ground in Canada right now, ideas that do not really apply to Quebec. On the one hand, we have the rise of a kind of conservative populism that denies climate change, has a narrow definition of freedom, is disconnected from Quebec's reality and has nothing to do with Quebecers' interests. On the other hand, we are seeing the rise of a sort of multicultural political correctness whose adherents view secularism as an obstacle to freedom and pluralism.

These two key political viewpoints show that Quebec's voice may not be adequately represented in this assembly. The same goes for economic interests. Quebec's voice is not well represented in this assembly when it comes to economic interests. The majority of our debates are focused on oil and gas.

There are two major sectors of activity in Canada. One is the automotive sector, and the other is the oil and gas sector. I hear my Conservative colleagues making connections between the current crisis in Ukraine and big oil's agenda. This does not affect Quebecers. I look forward to seeing my Conservative colleagues from Quebec stand up to address the issues that affect Quebec a bit more. Just look at the softwood lumber sector. Canada has never wanted to go to battle to come to an agreement with the United States that would be good for Quebec. This is one illustration, one manifestation of Quebec's loss of influence.

The same thing goes for Quebec's legitimate aspirations. I will just go over them quickly, but there is Bill 96 on the official and common language of Quebec. Some people have said that this law discriminates against the English-speaking minority, which is probably better treated than any other minority in the whole world. Anglophones make up 8% of Quebec's population, but they get 32% or 33% of the post-secondary education funding. Give me a break.

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It is the same thing with the challenges to Bill 21, Quebec's secularism bill. The mayors of some municipalities were quick to portray the secularism law as something racist that should be fought. In a way, that is another illustration of Quebec's waning influence.

What can stand as a bulwark? Well, Quebec nationalism can. Unfortunately, though, Quebec nationalism gets bad press, and perhaps that is what I want to talk about today. I want us to define together what Quebec nationalism is. This is important, because the bill introduced by the dreaded member for Drummond contains a provision about the nation. I would therefore like us to agree on what we mean by "Quebec nationalism".

First of all, Quebec nationalism is not a bellicose nationalism. There has never been any question of invading Ontario or fighting New Brunswick. Quebec nationalism has absolutely nothing to do with what we understand as bellicose nationalism.

In my opinion, the most interesting thesis on Quebec nationalism comes from Léon Dion, the father of another well-known Dion, the one who still had a Quebec conscience. I mean no offence.

Léon Dion's thesis is that during the first half of the 20th century, a conservative nationalism emerged in Quebec. It was a nationalism associated with the myth of survival. It is true that it is an identity-based nationalism, in which Quebecers clung to the reference points they had, that is, their language and their religion. That religion has historically been quite problematic for us, as my grandmother, who was forced to have 18 children, could attest. That is why, today, we understand to some extent why our vision of religion differs from that of Canadians.

Léon Dion also talks about a liberal or social-democratic nationalism that is associated with the birth of the Quebec state during the Quiet Revolution.

• (1225)

I would like to share a quote from Jean Lesage, who said: "The only power we have is our state, the state of Quebec. We cannot afford the luxury of letting it sit idle." This quote gets to the heart of Quebec nationalism. When Lesage said this, he was also alluding to a theme he would champion throughout what would become the Quiet Revolution: The Quebec state will be the driving force of our emancipation.

When I think of nationalism, I think of the Quebec state protecting a national minority that has a different culture. I want to dispel a myth about Quebec nationalism that has persisted for some 50 years now, which is that Quebec nationalism is a form of withdrawal. I disagree.

Hubert Aquin did the best job of debunking that myth about Quebec in 1962. He wrote a response to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the father of another person we know, who had written a passionate critique of Quebec nationalism in an essay called "La nouvelle trahison des clercs", or the new treason of the intellectuals.

That makes me think of a story that bears repeating. Who here knows the difference between Mr. Trudeau and René Lévesque? During the Second World War, Mr. Trudeau was fortunate to be in Canada, canoeing all kinds of lakes, while René Lévesque was working as a war correspondent for American media outlets. René

Lévesque was one of the first journalists to enter Dachau. Meanwhile, Pierre Elliott Trudeau was off canoeing. René Lévesque never equated Quebec nationalism with the type of nationalism based on inward-looking attitudes or aggressive nationalism. Meanwhile, Trudeau senior, who was busy paddling around, did make that dubious connection. End of story.

In "La nouvelle trahison des clercs", Pierre Elliott Trudeau says it is up to us to be our best selves because being better will show English Canada that French-Canadian culture is vibrant.

In "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français", Hubert Aquin offered this magnificent response: "Why should French Canadians have to be better? Why must they 'break through' to justify their existence?"

This is one of the bigger Gordian knots in Canada. Why do we have to continually fight to legitimize our existence? This is what Hubert Aquin said.

What Hubert Aquin did that was so fantastic is that he debunked the myth of nationalism as a withdrawal into one's identity. He pointed out that the Quebec nation has never been based on a single ethnicity; that the Quebec nation is the result of diasporas of many nationalities; that it is the result of a history founded by French Canadians, of course, but from a plurality of ethnicities. The only thing that these people share is a common culture.

When Hubert Aquin responded to Trudeau senior in 1962, he said that the fundamental distinction between English Canada and French Canada is that French Canada is monocultural. French Canada is based on one culture, while English Canada is bicultural. In this sense, according to Hubert Aquin, there is an openness to diversity. This openness is possible as long as Quebec's culture is respected.

I will conclude by saying that the best way to protect Quebec culture is to accept the nationalism that goes with it.

• (1230)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Jonquière for his passionate and fascinating speech. I will not be making any comments about his weight.

He talked a lot about the importance of nationalism and the fact that it should not be seen as looking inward. I would also like to hear him talk about the fact that we are here for one thing.

Nationalism is fine, but until independence has been achieved, and until we are a country, we have a vested interest in being here to defend our interests.

Nationalism is one step, it protects us, but it leads us to something much greater for the Quebec nation.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I want to come back to Hubert Aquin. In his essay “La fatigue culturelle du Canada français”, he asked: what will ultimately become of French Canada? That is a question that I have been asking myself for the past 30 years.

Could my identity disappear in the distant future? Could the unique place that Quebecers have in the world disappear? Yes, it could happen if we let things go; if our political weight in the House is reduced; and if we set aside what has sustained us over the past 50 or 60 years: the dream of building a country.

• (1235)

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Jonquière.

[English]

To some extent, I agree with the Bloc regarding its nationhood. It is not lost on me that the Bloc is arguing this as settlers, whereupon Inuit and first nations have lived and thrived since time immemorial. I agree that linguistic and cultural criteria should be of paramount importance to the electoral redistribution process.

I must ask the member what his party will do to ensure that Inuit, first nations and Métis are represented within his party.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I have always found similarities in what Quebecers and indigenous nations have been calling for. Unfortunately, sometimes we get in each other's way, and we know why.

Regarding the two major rounds of constitutional negotiations, Meech and Charlottetown, why did indigenous peoples never managed to gain recognition afterwards, even though they also seek political autonomy? It is because federalists are afraid of setting a precedent. By setting this precedent, they will be forced to grant the Quebec nation the same thing. Unfortunately, it will take courage on the part of people who hold a federalist point of view to offer recognition to the indigenous nations and, by the same token, offer recognition to the Quebec nation as well.

We have a lot of things to share together.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to listen to my colleague. He is so eloquent and intelligent and has a passion for literature, the great researchers and the great writers. My question is a little more down to earth.

He also comes from a region, Jonquière, which is known as the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region. Could he explain how people living in sparsely populated, rural and remote areas stand to lose the most if the Canada Elections Act is overhauled? There is also the matter of land use, which is at the heart of our discussions.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, my whip is so wise.

I did not mention this in my speech, but yes, we must ensure that the distribution between major urban centres and the regions is balanced. I am a country mouse. I come from the regions, and the way we identify politically is different from people in urban areas. We need to have a voice and this needs to be taken into account as well.

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I am happy that my whip was there to bring this up.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with my colleague from Hochelaga.

It is with great pleasure that I rise to discuss an important issue, the readjustment of Canada's federal electoral boundaries.

My speech today will focus on a key aspect of the electoral boundaries readjustment process, which has now officially begun.

The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act sets out the process by which the seats of the House of Commons are redistributed every 10 years. Why every 10 years? It corresponds to the timing of the release of decennial census data, which is used by the Chief Electoral Officer to calculate seat allocation.

As all hon. members know, the Chief Electoral Officer used this data to do the necessary calculation in October 2021. Since then, 10 independent commissions have been created, one in each province. These three-member commissions include a chair, who is appointed by the chief justice of the province, and two members, who are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

I would like to take a moment to thank these distinguished Canadians for agreeing to do this work. The commitment they have made cannot be overstated, and I know all my colleagues agree with that.

A cynical person might say that, as MPs, we have a disproportionate level of interest in this process, but I would like to remind members that this work has a direct impact on the way each of us serves Canadians. As a result, public consultations play an essential role in the redistribution process.

I am delighted to say that, when the independent electoral boundaries commissions publish their initial boundary proposals, there will be at least one public hearing held in every province. Thanks to these public consultations, Canadians in all 10 provinces will have the opportunity to have their say about the proposals. What is more, members of the House of Commons will have the opportunity to provide input at the public hearings and voice any objections they may have.

The electoral boundaries commissions have started to develop an initial series of revised electoral district maps, which will be published in the coming months.

Then, pursuant to section 19 of the act, the commissions will publish their respective proposals in the Canada Gazette and at least one newspaper of general circulation. It is important to note that the proposal must include the dates and times of the public hearings. Under the act, the commissions must organize at least one public hearing, and it must be held 30 days after the proposal is published.

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It is important to note that the commissions can hold more than one public hearing. In fact, history confirms it. During the 2012 re-distribution process, 132 public hearings were held in Canada's 10 provinces.

It will come as no surprise, but the larger provinces held more public hearings than the smaller ones. For example, there were 31 public hearings in Ontario, 23 in British Columbia, 21 in Quebec and 15 in Alberta. What is more, in order to encourage participation, many of the public hearings were held in the evening.

Beyond the Canadians and MPs who made presentations, either orally or in writing, during the public hearings, the commissions agreed to consider comments received by email, fax and other means. Saskatchewan's commission received nearly 3,000 presentations in various forms, including emails, letters and petitions.

It is highly likely that the commissions will do everything they can to reach as many people as possible in their province.

• (1240)

I think it is also fair to say that, given the rapid changes in the information and communications environment since 2012, the commissions can probably reach an even broader public this time around. In other words, this broad public consultation, which is set to begin between April and October 2022, will allow the commissions to gather valuable information when they are revising and finalizing their proposals.

Before getting into the opportunity that MPs have to participate, I must note that in 2012, community groups, municipalities and other organizations submitted many presentations. This contribution is essential, because these stakeholders represent communities' points of view in a way that is different, but equally important for MPs.

As I mentioned earlier, all members can present their views at these public hearings. I therefore encourage any member who feels compelled to do so, since we have unique local knowledge of our constituencies and the needs of our constituents.

Furthermore, once a commission has submitted a revised report, members may also file written objections with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Once the committee has considered these objections, a copy of the objections and the committee's minutes will be forwarded to the relevant commission. Under section 23 of the act, the commission shall then consider objections that may result in changes to its boundary proposal or to the names of the proposed electoral districts.

Before I close, I would once again like to emphasize a point I made at the beginning of my speech: The electoral boundaries commissions are fully independent and responsible for producing and finalizing the boundary proposals. Although the commissions are solely responsible for this important work, as I tried to explain during my speech, there are many opportunities for the public and every member of the House to participate.

I want to close by emphasizing that all Canadians deserve to have effective representation in the House of Commons. Does this mean that we have to perfectly match a province's population to the proportion of seats assigned to that province? The answer is no, of

course not. Representation must reflect the unique character of Canada.

I believe that all members will agree that what is most important here is the notion of effective representation. The commissions will consider the most recent census data, as well as such factors as the importance of protecting communities of interest and historical boundaries.

What does effective representation mean to Canadians? It means knowing that their MP is sensitive to their concerns. I know that is something we all take to heart, and it is probably the reason each of us decided to run for public office. We want to serve the Canadians who voted for us.

Every day, voters turn to their MPs to obtain advice on a certain number of issues. These issues are quite varied. It could concern progress on an immigration or visa application by a family member. Others want information about federal assistance programs. I do not have to tell my colleagues just how important this point of contact and this representation were during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now more than ever, we must show leadership and help all Canadians be heard. I hope that my colleagues will join me in encouraging that result.

• (1245)

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for his very detailed, educational and informative speech. Unfortunately, I will only speak to the final comments because I cannot summarize all of it.

What stood out for me was the notion of effective representation. In that regard, does my colleague believe that, with its motion, the Bloc Québécois is right in wanting to maintain Quebec's weight, its weight as a nation, within Canada?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to perhaps inform my colleague that I was one of the three people who first proposed that Quebec be recognized as a nation at a convention of the Quebec section of the Liberal Party of Canada in 2006. Two other Liberals joined me in doing so.

I am very pleased that, a few months later, the House gave its unanimous consent to recognize Quebec as a nation. I have always supported this important recognition for my province.

I also mentioned how the distribution of seats has an impact on the efficacy of representation. I look forward to hearing what all Canadians have to say about this issue, particularly in my province of Quebec. It is important to hear what they have to say, and we need to recognize Quebec's unique differences.

• (1250)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to ask him the following question. Does he think it makes sense for Quebec to lose a seat in the redistribution of the electoral boundaries? Given that this could set a precedent because no province has ever lost a seat before and given that the same thing could also happen in other provinces, the commission should expect opposition from Quebec and even some of the other provinces.

Can the government tell the commission not to bring about this type of scenario?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He raises an important point. Historically, no province has ever lost a seat. That is an extremely important consideration in this discussion between us and with all Canadians.

At the same time, as I said, we need to recognize certain historical facts and certain things that are unique in all the provinces. That has already been done in the Constitution Act, 1867. We need to debate it. I look forward to hearing from other members of the House, but also from Quebecers and people from our other provinces.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke to the idea of effective representation, and while it is a little beyond the scope of the current motion, I am curious as to his views on the idea of moving to a truly proportional system in the way we hold elections, such as the mixed-member proportional system that is common in European countries. Could the member share his personal view on that idea?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I have always been very clear, as far back as 2013, that I personally favour a preferential vote approach. I have always said that publicly and that has been my position from the beginning.

[Translation]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask another question on the same topic as the one from the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Perhaps the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount could clarify his response.

I am very pleased to hear that he remains opposed to the first-past-the-post voting system.

I think he would prefer a preferential ballot system, but the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley asked if he supported a proportional representation voting system in the House.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I will try to clarify my answer.

I told the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley what my personal preferences would be. That is what he asked me and that is what I said.

However, we had a debate on what voting methods we should use. That went on for a long time after the 2015 election. As the Liberal Party very aptly put it, there was no consensus in Canada

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and no large majority in favour of one system over another. That is why we still have the current system.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today it is my turn to rise in the House to address one of the important processes of our democracy: electoral redistribution. Indeed, the official process of redistribution of electoral districts must, by law, take place every 10 years.

For 60 years, independent, non-partisan electoral boundaries commissions have been responsible for redrawing our electoral maps. These commissions were created in 1964 when Parliament passed the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. This independent approach was introduced to avoid the risk of political interference in this important process. It is an approach that aims to maintain the integrity and transparency of our democratic systems and institutions. Moreover, we have seen, through several events in recent years, and again recently, how fragile the public's confidence in our democratic institutions can be. This is why it is so important to properly follow the process of redrawing the electoral map.

While this process has already begun, Elections Canada has already made a proposal that, as a member from Quebec, I find surprising. No matter what anyone says or does, it is not the federal government's decision to reduce Quebec's weight in the House. This proposal comes from a completely independent institution and is not a political matter. Still, for the Bloc Québécois, this is another way of trying to create debates and disputes between Quebec and the federal government.

The fact is, the Bloc Québécois is not the only party making sure Quebec's voice is heard in the House. The Bloc Québécois is not the only party fighting for Quebec. The Bloc Québécois certainly does not have a monopoly on being Québécois. As a proud member from Quebec and a proud Quebecer, fighting for Quebec is what I do and have done every day since being elected. The people taking action for Quebec are not the ones on the opposition benches; they are the ones in government. Since 2015, that is exactly what we have been doing every day: delivering concrete results.

We are making a difference in the lives of all Quebecers. We invested a record \$1.8 billion to build housing and tackle the housing crisis affecting all of Quebec, especially our wonderful metropolis. We signed a \$6-billion agreement to create thousands of child care spaces in Quebec because we know there is a shortage of spaces for Quebec families. We invested \$172 million to take effective action in partnership with cities against homelessness in Montreal and elsewhere in the province. We will connect all Quebecers to high-speed Internet thanks to record investments in Canada-Quebec operation high speed. We were there with the Canadian Armed Forces to help seniors in long-term care homes at the height of the pandemic. Our armed forces also supported the vaccination campaign during the pandemic in Quebec.

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That is what we have been doing. We take concrete action for Quebecers every day. Getting things done for Quebec comes from having Quebec MPs in government. I am very proud to be part of a team of 35 Liberal MPs who are getting results for Quebec every day.

What this motion is trying to do, to some extent, is to show that the federal government is disconnected from Quebecers and that it does not hear their concerns. Quebec's political weight has always been important, and it will not be eroded in 2022 under our government, which is there for Quebec. We must not politicize this debate. Unfortunately, it is being implied that the federal government has contempt for Quebecers, but the reality is quite different. I still remember an announcement that our government made in 2017. For the first time, the federal government invested \$2.4 million to fund Quebec's national holiday. The Bloc Québécois may have already forgotten that this was the first time the federal government funded Quebec's national holiday, that federal money was invested in the national holiday.

It was also our government that invested \$750,000 to develop Espace René-Lévesque in New Carlisle, the hometown of one of our great democrats from Quebec. I would like the Bloc Québécois to admit that and to commend the federal government on such initiatives, which preserve the memory of René Lévesque.

It will also be our Liberal government that will bring forward the modernization of the Official Languages Act to protect our beautiful French language. We are also taking action to protect the French language and francophone culture on major digital platforms.

These are several examples of how the Liberal Party is taking concrete action for Quebec.

• (1255)

We still have a lot of work to do, but I can assure the House that the 35 members from Quebec on this side are working hard to improve the lives of Quebecers. Whether it is to defend our culture, our languages, our progressive values, or the desire to leave a green future, we will always be there to fight for Quebec.

We all agree that the demographic weight of a francophone nation must be preserved. However, I do think that it is a shame that we have politicized this debate today instead of taking a more unanimous stance.

• (1300)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am extremely disappointed with the tone taken by my colleague from Hochelaga today. I do not know what mood she was in when she read the Bloc Québécois motion. I do not see where she got the impression that it criticizes the work of the government or the work of the members from Quebec, regardless of political stripe.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Members from Quebec of all political stripes should see this motion as an opportunity to work better for Quebec, to come up with the tools to continue to work better for Quebec, and to better represent its interests. We have plenty of opportunities to criticize what the government is do-

ing, but I can assure the House that there is nothing of the sort in the motion that we have tabled today.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the possibility of losing a seat here in the House of Commons and the real impact that this could have on Quebec's political weight and on the work that members from Quebec, regardless of political stripe, can do for their constituents in the House of Commons.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that every time the Bloc Québécois moves a motion, it is also a way for them to make partisan political gains. Yes, I did say partisan gains. In this instance, an independent commission is dealing with this issue. We work together every day for the good of Quebec. Today's debate in the House, however, is politicizing the issue.

Quebec's demographics and weight depend on many things, not only on representation by its members, but also on the growth of its population, especially its francophone population. This is also the Quebec government's job, and it must take responsibility for it.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here we are debating concerns about the threat to democratic representation in the House of Commons and the lack thereof. We know proportional systems have better representation in terms of democracy. The Prime Minister ran on a platform in 2015 that it would be the last unfair election and that we would get rid of the first past the post system, which we know does not work very well. It certainly could help reduce cynicism and encourage greater political participation if we had a proportional system.

Does my colleague not agree that a proportional representation electoral system would better serve Canadians and reduce the cynicism I talked about earlier? We keep hearing the Liberals say they support changing the system, like their Prime Minister said, yet they continue to say they cannot come to an agreement. Leadership is about making decisions and ensuring representation is real. That is not happening. Maybe my colleague can speak to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I will not deny that the Liberal Party and the government made commitments on electoral reform in 2015. However, it would be such a major reform based on the democratic rule of law that we cannot base it only on a majority decision.

This reform must be unanimous and the product of consensus. This consensus did not exist at the time, which is why the reform was not carried out. That being said, I still think, like my colleague, that electoral reform needs to be addressed in Canada in order to make it more representative.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask my colleague whether francophone immigration could help bolster Quebec's demographic weight and whether immigration would be a strength or a weakness.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Yes, we must ensure the sustainability of the francophone nation and maintain Quebec's demographic weight.

I hope my colleagues in the opposition will call on Quebec to increase francophone immigration, because this is one way to maintain this population in Quebec and throughout Canada.

• (1305)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, allow me to take a deep breath before I start my speech.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Manicouagan.

Not too long ago, an anglophone journalist asked me whether Bill C-246, which I recently introduced and which would add a so-called Quebec nation clause to the Constitution, was just another frivolous request from Quebec. After a polite pause, she added that, according to some people, this was yet another temper tantrum by Quebecers who refuse to embrace living in harmony the Canadian way.

In response to these comments, all kinds of words came to my mind, words that common decency prevents us from using in this place, as we speak on behalf of our constituents. Although my constituents would not hold it against me if I let loose an avalanche of words that would enhance Quebec's chrestomathy for my many Canadian colleagues looking to learn the language of Leclerc and Vigneault, I will refrain from dipping into that vast inventory of words learned over decades spent in the shadows of chasubles and cassocks. I would rather take a step back.

Once I stepped back and calmed down, I could see that the comments of this young journalist were not meant to be disrespectful of Quebec society but unfortunately reflected opinions and ideas that are widespread in the Canadian provinces. It is the fruit of decades of conscious and unconscious efforts to dampen the enthusiasm of the Quebec nation in its quest for autonomy and independence.

I cannot really blame that young journalist for her comments, because she was born at a time when the narrative was already well entrenched. The seed had been planted and when the fruit is ripe, we do not think about how it grew. We are living in a time of intellectual laziness where people swallow everything they are served without asking too many questions. In fact, I would go so far as to say that these are rather sad times.

What do we do about that? I think that we need to avoid confrontation and focus on education and awareness. We have to explain why Quebec is so focused on its uniqueness, its cultural differences and its different vision on so many issues. This rather reductive perception of the Quebec nation, its political and cultural heritage and its place in the history of this country is regrettable. We need not be surprised at this view and misunderstanding of Quebec, its historic weight and its resulting legitimate aspirations, because this is all built upon misperceptions throughout Canada's institutional and political evolution.

We can go all the way back to the origins of Confederation in 1867 to better understand the place Quebec has within the Canadian federation. Again, Quebec is not a province. It is the product and

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the standard-bearer of one of the two distinct national communities at Canada's very origin. This dualism that people would like to forget or reduce to so little is in fact the foundation of the institutions that we are part of today.

Over the past 40 years, almost all of Quebec's aspirations and claims within the Canadian federation have been rejected. After that night in 1982, when all of Quebec was betrayed, all attempts to remedy this situation have failed. Sometimes, these attempts have been symbolic, other times they have been mere administrative accommodations. There are numerous examples.

Does all this make the quest to affirm the autonomy of the Quebec people less legitimate? No, because, I would point out, Quebec is more than just a province. Quebec is a nation. That was officially recognized in this place in 2006, as my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount said earlier. Furthermore, as was reaffirmed not that long ago, in June 2021, Quebec is a nation whose only official and common language is French. It is the only one on the North American continent.

Our responsibility, as difficult as it may be, is to continue the discussion and the ongoing exchanges unabated, without partisanship, to ensure the message is heard and to have Quebec recognized for what it is.

Consequently, the Quebec nation must be much more than just a symbol.

• (1310)

Its recognition must be embodied in concrete actions and provisions that go well beyond declarations and intentions. This is what we will have the opportunity to do in a few weeks when we debate Bill C-246, which I mentioned in my opening comments. And that is what we are doing today as well, as a preamble, by debating this motion, which was moved this morning by my leader and colleague, the member for Belœil—Chambly.

At the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, Quebec accounted for nearly 30% of the Canadian population. Today, roughly speaking, it accounts for 23%, and this is not getting any better. Indeed, Quebec and Canada must make efforts to correct this trend, and this work must focus on immigration. There is talk of wanting to increase immigration levels. Quebec has its own vision. We want to be able to welcome immigration to Quebec in a coherent and intelligent way. We can say that welcoming 100,000 newcomers is unrealistic if we want to welcome them properly. It is up to Quebec to determine the appropriate number or rate for its immigration capacity. That said, we are also relying on the federal government to not hinder immigration to Quebec. For example, as my colleague from Saint-Jean mentioned earlier, the treatment of student visa applicants from French-speaking Africa and the way they are discriminated against are very concerning.

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When Quebec declines, French declines. The presence of French in Parliament declines. I say that with the utmost respect and consideration for francophone communities across Canada, who, like Quebec, are fighting every day for the survival of their language and recognition of their language rights within the Canadian federation. It has been recognized that the Quebec nation is one of the two founding peoples. Well, that reality must push us to take action to preserve the French fact, to maintain the Quebec nation's influence here in the House of Commons and around the world.

Canada prides itself on having two official languages and we like to say that they are English and simultaneous translation, but we must recognize that French is one as well. The motion we tabled today is intended to protect Quebec's identity, to protect Quebec's political influence, to ensure that Quebec continues to be represented as a nation, here in the House of Commons and within Canadian institutions as long as Quebec does not decide to stand on its own.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier, based on what the leader of the Bloc Party has said, how important actions were.

Today we introduced the official languages modernization act. Yesterday we brought forward debate on Bill C-11 in regard to the modernization of the Broadcasting Act. Both of these pieces of legislation, from a national perspective, would ensure the protection of arts and culture. I know that my Quebec colleagues, in fact all of us, see the true value of that industry in the province of Quebec and how it has enhanced the heritage of Quebec.

I am wondering if the member opposite recognizes that one does not necessarily have to be an MP from the province of Quebec, as I am not, as he knows, to advocate for wonderful things for the province of Quebec. I would like to think that members of the Bloc would also advocate for my province when it comes down to the issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Winnipeg North because he mentioned Bill C-11 on broadcasting, which I obviously care a lot about.

Today's motion and Bill C-246, which I think are somewhat related because they are similar in purpose, do not criticize the government's work or the intentions and work of members from other parts of Canada.

Yes, there are some good provisions in Bill C-11 to protect the discoverability, the showcasing and the presence of francophone content but also content from various communities, such as first nations communities, francophone communities outside Quebec and minority language communities. There are a lot of good things in that bill. In any case, it is what we expect from a government. We expect a government to create laws and regulations for the country as a whole, not just for certain parts of the country. This motion is not criticizing the Liberal government or its work, rather, it is a way of ensuring that Quebec maintains the political weight it deserves as a nation in the coming decades, in the future.

• (1315)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond; I enjoy working with him on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

There is no doubt that the NDP will support the motion. However, it was mentioned in the debate earlier that the Bloc Québécois will be introducing a bill in a few weeks that will essentially say the same thing. This means that there will be a debate in a few weeks.

I am a bit puzzled. There is currently a climate crisis; last summer's heat wave in British Columbia killed 600. There is also a housing crisis, which has affected Quebeckers enormously. There is also the problem with health transfers, the war in Ukraine, and the pandemic. There are a lot of crises going on right now, but the Bloc is planning to present the same thing in the next few weeks, so we will debate it twice. There is an opposition day every three months. It seems to me that they could have picked two different topics.

Why did the Bloc choose to introduce a motion and a bill on the same topic, when there are so many crises affecting Quebeckers?

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I will say that I enjoy working with my colleague at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage meetings.

I have two answers to my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby's question.

The first thing I would say is that we can walk and chew gum at the same time. It is pretty incredible, but we can. In his speech this morning, my leader said there would never be a right time. If we wait, there will always be something else. I think there is never a bad time to put this issue on the table.

The other thing I want to do is thank my colleague for his advice on the Bloc Québécois's agenda. We can actually make our own decisions, and we will continue to do so. Nevertheless, I am grateful for his suggestions.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by telling my colleague from Drummond how much I admire him and how much I appreciate his work as a member of Parliament. Sometimes we have to say these things to each other as colleagues. He works so hard, and he is so passionate about everything from his role as heritage critic to his sponsorship of Bill C-246, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (representation in the House of Commons), which he introduced on February 8.

He introduced the bill to promote and protect the interests of people in his riding, in mine and across Quebec, to protect Quebec's weight in the House of Commons by guaranteeing that 25% of the seats here will belong to Quebecers because Quebec is a nation.

It is therefore with conviction, but also with the certainty that I am doing what is right for Quebecers and Quebec, that I rise today to debate the Bloc Québécois motion. This motion also addresses Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons, and it reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House:

(a) any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts or that would reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected; and

(b) the formula for apportioning seats in the House must be amended and the House call on the government to act accordingly.

Basically, what the Bloc Québécois is asking the House to do is to commit, as we have, to demanding that the government meaningfully protect Quebec's weight. I repeat, Quebec is a francophone nation within a country that is bilingual on paper.

The Bloc Québécois is certainly not tabling this motion by chance or on a whim. Like pictures, numbers are worth a thousand words. From 1867 to 2021, Quebec's weight in the House of Commons declined, shrinking from 36% in 1867 to 23.1% in 2015, and it is still declining. At the same time, the number of MPs from Quebec has very slowly and humbly risen, from 65 out of 181 MPs in 1867 to 78 out of 338 MPs in 2015.

In the next redistribution, which would take effect in 2024 at the earliest, Quebec's weight would continue to drop, eventually to 22.5%. Moreover, for the first time in history, Quebec would lose a seat, with its number of elected officials dropping to 77 out of 342. For the Bloc Québécois and Quebec, that is unacceptable.

Of course, the decennial process of electoral boundaries redistribution is not a surprise, nor are its mechanics. First, the Chief Electoral Officer determines the electoral quotient, that is, the population per electoral district, by assessing the population increase since the last redistribution exercise. Currently, with a population increase of nearly 10% in 10 years, the population per electoral district is almost 122,000. The number of seats allocated to each province and to Quebec is then calculated by dividing the total population of Quebec and the provinces by the electoral quotient of 122,000.

However, as the Quebec minister responsible for Canadian relations and the Canadian francophonie, Sonia LeBel, has said repeatedly, there is more to it than a simple mathematical formula. It is important to take into account the real weight of Quebec's representation in the House of Commons. We are francophones; we have a special status and a nation to defend. Quebec's specificity must prevent us from losing seats in the House of Commons.

There is more to redistribution than a simple rule of three. If that were the case, Prince Edward Island would have only one member in the next redistribution, and some Prairie provinces would lose members. That is why there are two clauses in addition to the electoral quotient: the senatorial clause and the grandfather clause. I just illustrated this by talking about the Prairies and Prince Edward Island.

Business of Supply

• (1320)

The third and final aspect is the following. It is the last element for now, but I hope there will be another.

This third element shapes the electoral redistribution that the Chief Electoral Officer must adhere to. It is called the representation rule. In other words, when a province does not have enough MPs to represent a riding, then more ridings, more members, need to be added.

These clauses and rules were enacted over the past 150 years, roughly, but they are not immutable. I will quote the Canadian Encyclopedia, something I never imagined I would do. It concludes its article on the redistribution of federal electoral districts by focusing on the principle of balance:

Although at first glance, this would seem to be a straightforward mathematical exercise, the principle of political equality exists alongside the fact that Canada is a federal state and the idea that effective representation also requires the recognition of distinct communities. Balancing these principles is at the heart of the redistribution process.

Quebec is nothing less than a nation of more than eight million people who share a territory, a language, a culture and a vision. In 2006, the House of Commons recognized the Quebec nation. This is a nation whose official and common language is French, as the House of Commons recognized in 2021, when it voted in favour of the Bloc Québécois motion to that effect.

As long as Quebec is not a country, it will not have all the tools it should have for self-determination, and this will necessarily have political consequences, namely respect for Quebec's autonomy and its national assembly, the signing of asymmetrical agreements, and the acknowledgement of Quebec's distinct character in federal laws and policies.

That is what Quebec is calling for today. It is calling on the House to take into account our nation and its corollary, in other words, the defence of its political weight.

The Bloc Québécois is waiting for a firm and unequivocal commitment from parliamentarians and wishes to clarify the position of parties in the House.

Let us remember the following. In 1992, the Charlottetown accord guaranteed that Quebec would have 25% of the weight in the House of Commons. The former Progressive Conservative Party was in favour of that. The Reform Party of Canada was against it. John Turner supported it, but Pierre Elliott Trudeau was against it. In 2006, the NDP supported it, but what about now?

Some Canadian political parties have disappeared, and others have transformed into something different, but the Bloc Québécois has remained true to itself: logical, consistent and always ready to defend Quebec's interests.

We want to know if, like Quebecers, Canadian political parties are worried about the fate of Quebec, if they will reject any electoral redistribution scenario that reduces Quebec's political weight, and if they will act accordingly. To that end, why not add a "nation clause"? That is the role of parliamentarians.

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To conclude, I would like to quote my leader, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, and the Premier of Quebec, François Legault, who have both made statements since October expressing how Quebec feels about this threat.

The Premier of Quebec said that “the Quebec nation deserves a certain degree of representation in the House of Commons, regardless of how many people live in each province”. He said that “this is a test for [the Prime Minister of Canada]. It is all well and good to recognize Quebec as a nation, but now he needs to back that up with action.” We are calling on the Prime Minister of Canada to “protect the proportion of members of Parliament from Quebec”.

My leader also pointed out at the beginning of his speech that Quebec's weight has been reduced. Quebec absolutely cannot lose a seat, since this so-called bilingual country cannot allow its institutions to diminish the relative weight of its country's francophone territory.

I want to echo what he said. Canada has no idea how big a fight the Bloc Québécois will put up if Quebec's weight continues to decrease while it is still in the federation. If anything, that will make us leave even sooner.

I cannot wait until Quebec is able to make its own decisions.

• (1325)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who did a great job explaining certain points, even though I disagree with her.

She said that Quebec should be a country, or at least I think that is what I heard. We are in the House of Commons, in Ottawa, and we are talking about Quebec's representation within Canadian democracy.

I will be an ally to my colleague in ensuring that Quebec is well represented in the House. However, if we are going to move forward, I would like her to confirm that the Bloc Québécois will be satisfied by having Quebec well represented in the House and in Parliament.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Outremont for her question.

I do not want to speak for all my colleagues, but I dare to imagine that the only thing that would satisfy the Bloc Québécois is Quebec's independence. We sit in the House of Commons because Parliament exists in Canada. I send my taxes to Ottawa and of course I want Quebec to be free to benefit from them as it sees fit. When we ask that our nation, which has been recognized, retain its political weight, that is only a half measure. It already makes sense and it should make sense for parliamentarians and for the government.

Of course, we will always want more, because we want a country.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Manicouagan for her speech.

I would like to ask her if she believes that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should look into the issue of creating a mixed-member proportional voting system and a citizens' assembly.

• (1330)

[English]

Would that help the democratic reform discussion that we are having today in the House?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I would like to address two things. Of course, one always wants the best possible representation for the people. However, I have made a clarification several times, and I have quoted the Canadian Encyclopedia, Sonia Lebel and my leader, François Legault. We are saying that representation is necessary, but that it is not a simple mathematical calculation of proportion. Quebec is a nation and this must be taken into account. Obviously, the Bloc Québécois will support anything that improves the democratic process.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Manicouagan for her speech.

There is one thing I want to comment on. She talked about Ms. Lebel and Mr. Legault and what is going on in the National Assembly. Earlier, a Liberal MP once again accused the Bloc Québécois of picking a fight. I actually see us as spokespeople for Quebec's demands.

In 2010, the National Assembly adopted a motion to ensure Quebec would not lose any political weight in the House of Commons. As long as we are here, we must champion and speak on behalf of Quebecers, who just want Quebec, which is a nation and has that special status, to maintain its political weight in the House of Commons. That political weight is important. It must be protected, and we absolutely cannot lose a seat.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Shefford for her question.

I am disappointed to hear that anyone would try to minimize the impact of the Bloc Québécois's actions or accuse us of picking a fight. I think that is intellectually dishonest. I could make an analogy here, but like any analogy, it may be murky or flawed. Still, Ukraine is not picking a fight right now.

We want to stand up for our nation, our people, our values, our self-government and our integrity, and I think that is legitimate. It is legitimate for others, and it is legitimate for Quebec. Standing up for one's rights is not picking a fight.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Laurent.

It is a pleasure to rise to address a number of issues with a focus on what is before us right now. I cannot help but think of what is taking place in Europe. A number of members, when they stood up, started off by commenting on it. I would also like to do that, recognizing that what is happening in Ukraine today is top of mind for millions of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It is something that will have a profound impact throughout the world. The take-note debate last night had no shortage of members of Parliament wanting to contribute to it.

This is the type of issue that many Canadians would like to see the House possibly spend more time debating. In looking at the motion that the Bloc has brought before us today, we can kind of sense it. When the leader of the Bloc rose to speak, he made reference to Ukraine. I raise it because we should recognize that this is the very first opportunity that the Bloc has had to bring forward an opposition day motion in 2022. What makes it interesting is that the Bloc also has a private member's bill that deals with the same issue, which is also being scheduled for debate.

I am a bit confused as to why they chose this issue: whether it is because of what is happening in the world, with the real threat and possibility of World War III, and the horrendous things taking place in Ukraine today, or whether it is because of local issues. Perhaps it is the pandemic, and providing thoughts and guidance on that. We often hear about the environment. We hear a great deal about housing and so much more, yet the Bloc chose to have this particular debate. I suspect, unfortunately, that it has a lot to do with politics.

Let me provide some thoughts on this issue. Every 10 years, there is a readjustment that takes place. There is legislation that ensures there is an independent review of our boundaries and recommendations that follow. It is based, in part, on population shifts. We all know that populations change within municipalities, provinces and territories, obviously, and with interprovincial migration. That happens every year.

A couple of years back, we released, through Census Canada, a report that clearly showed that with regard to population growth in Canada, whether over the past decade or into the future, immigration had to be taken into consideration. Future population growth is going to very much depend on immigration. Looking at interprovincial immigration, or migration, to immigration, and reflecting on that over the last decade has ultimately brought us to the point where we are today. Back in October, I believe, the recommendation was to reduce a seat in the province of Quebec.

I have said this before in the House. I am very proud of my heritage and lineage that goes back to the province of Quebec. A couple of hundred years ago, my great-grandfathers and grandmothers would have been some of the pioneers in the province of Quebec. We were not the first. As we know, first nations were here before our francophone communities.

• (1335)

Migration, at least in some elements, went out west into the province of Manitoba, where I live today and which I proudly represent.

My passions, in terms of national policies, very much factor in the province of Quebec. I would not want any member to try to

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give an impression that unless one is a member of Parliament from Quebec, one does not necessarily care for what is happening in Quebec. I care for the province of Quebec in the same manner in which I care for our prairie provinces, the province of Ontario, the Atlantic provinces, our territories or B.C.

We have a lot in common, economically, in terms of things such as the aerospace industry. French is a beautiful language. It is a language that we want to encourage and promote and get more people speaking.

The province of Manitoba, and the St. Boniface community in particular, has a very healthy and growing francophone community. While Manitoba had immigration numbers during the nineties that were probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 3,000 to 4,000 annually, we have virtually quadrupled that number through the nominee program. Special attention was given to the francophone factor, which is very important, whether in urban Winnipeg through St. Boniface or in rural communities such as St-Pierre-Jolys, where my great-great-grandfather was born.

For me, it is taking a look at what we are actually doing. A Bloc member said that this is about action. Today, we had the minister bring forward changes that will have a very positive impact on bilingualism here in Canada with our Official Languages Act. Yesterday, we were debating Bill C-11, which deals with updating or modernizing the Broadcasting Act.

Actions do speak louder than words. I think it is important for us to recognize that the province of Quebec is in fact distinct and contributes so much to who we are overall as a nation.

That is why it is important that we support arts and culture, such as we have seen in Bill C-11. That is why, in part, we brought forward the legislation that we introduced for first reading today.

I understand the magic of 78. We see, in our history, when we have given consideration, for example, to the province of P.E.I. Because of the number of senators it has, it has to have an equal number of members of Parliament. I am very familiar with the grandfather clause that was put in in 1985.

I would have welcomed debate on this when the members opposite brought forward the legislation, because we know it is going to be brought in. I question the politics in that they would choose this particular motion when there is so much happening internationally and here in Canada, and that they would use this as the most important public policy issue on their first opposition day.

It is for them to ultimately make that determination, and I look forward to seeing the private member's bill being brought forward that I understand deals with the same issue.

• (1340)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I too am proud of my heritage, as the member for Winnipeg North said.

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Of course, my last name, Gill, is quite British—Gills were kidnapped, raised, and adopted by Abenaki people—and here I am in the House to represent Quebec. As my colleague from Drummond said earlier, we are able to walk and chew gum at the same time.

We now have proof that Canada is deciding what is good for Quebec. They are telling the Bloc Québécois that it should not be using this opposition day to talk about what it wants to talk about, namely, what concerns Quebec. I find it a bit ill-advised to put it that way.

We are also being told that we have an urgent crisis. I completely agree that what is happening in Ukraine right now is truly a crisis, but we can multitask. I would add that I find it rather odd to be lectured by a party who was unable to manage a street and is now talking about a war outside Canada.

I would like to know whether the member for Winnipeg North agrees with our motion.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect if they were to read what the leader of the Bloc Party had to say and the preamble to the question the member asked, they too would recognize that their priorities might be a little out of place. In both cases, they referenced what is happening at the international level.

Regarding the motion at hand, the member is going to find out exactly what I will do in good time. At the end of the day, there will be a vote. I can assure the member that, even though I am not a member of the Quebec legislature, I am someone who respects the needs of all communities, particularly those of the province of Quebec. I will always be an advocate for Quebec.

• (1345)

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqaqtittiji.*

I represent 25 remote fly-in communities, 25 communities with mayors, 25 communities with airports and 25 communities with any number of schools, including a French school in Iqaluit. The land mass of my riding extends from Alberta to Quebec. The discussion on seat distribution is of particular interest to me, and I realize the member thinks that the timing is not the best.

Does the member agree that the representation criteria and seat distribution should be expanded to include the vastness of the land mass in Canada?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, to a certain degree, we do that already. Each territory is given one member of Parliament. Looking at the population of the three territories compared to the Canadian average, it is very obvious that it is given, as well it should be. Territories and provinces need representation, and it would not be appropriate to have one member of Parliament representing three territories.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in Ukraine is about democracy. The Conservatives keep using it to claim that we should be pumping oil production, which I think is abusive, but my colleague surprised me when he said there is a crisis in Ukraine and chastised the Bloc for talking about the democratic set-up of the House.

The fight in Ukraine is about democracy. It is about the right of people to make decisions about how their democracy is going to be maintained. I welcome this decision by the Bloc. The Bloc has a right to bring this forward and should not be chided for it. This is a fair conversation.

Why does my hon. colleague think that, just because we are talking about the international crisis, we cannot talk about improving democracy at home?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is just a personal opinion. If I were in opposition and did not want to dabble in the international crisis, I would be talking about issues such as health care transfers, the environment or housing.

It is my personal opinion that the Bloc and opposition parties will do what the Bloc and opposition parties will do. However, I suspect if the Bloc were to canvass its constituents, this might not necessarily be the primary issue they want it to deal with, given that it also has a private member's bill that will be debated on the very same issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss the House of Commons seat distribution formula and the redrawing of the federal electoral map.

On October 15, 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada announced the redistribution of seats in the House of Commons.

Under the current electoral boundaries readjustment process, the provinces and territories will be represented in the House of Commons as follows: 43 seats for British Columbia, 37 for Alberta, 14 for Saskatchewan, 14 for Manitoba, 122 for Ontario, 77 for Quebec, 10 for New Brunswick, 11 for Nova Scotia, 4 for Prince Edward Island, 7 for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1 for Yukon, 1 for the Northwest Territories, and 1 for Nunavut.

This distribution is the result of a calculation based on population estimates provided by the chief statistician of Canada and a formula set out in the Constitution Act, 1867.

[English]

For nearly 60 years, independent, non-partisan electoral boundary commissions have been responsible for redrawing our electoral maps. These commissions were established in 1964, when Parliament passed the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. The act sets out the rules and responsibilities, the process, and the criteria these commissions must follow when redrawing our federal electoral boundaries.

This independent approach was introduced by design to reduce the risk of political interference in the process and to maintain integrity and transparency in our democratic systems and institutions. Prior to 1964, the House of Commons itself was responsible for fixing the boundaries of electoral districts through a committee appointed especially for that purpose. However, Parliament realized that the manipulation of riding boundaries to benefit members of the governing party was a significant risk to the integrity of our system. That was and remains unacceptable.

The introduction of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act was a critical measure put in place to solve that problem. As outlined in the act, a three-member commission must be established for each province. These commissions are composed of one chairperson and two commissioners. I would like to remind hon. members that, because this process occurs every 10 years, the government does not recommend or appoint members to these provincial commissions. To be clear, they are independently appointed. In fact, the government's role in the entire process is extremely limited.

• (1350)

[Translation]

I would now like to talk about the formula used for redistribution. There are four steps. This is how the Chief Electoral Officer arrived at the result mentioned earlier.

First, the initial number of seats allocated to each province is calculated. To do that, the electoral quotient must be calculated, based on the average of each province's growth rate over the past decade. Quebec, for example, grew by 7.83% between 2011 and 2021. In contrast, Ontario grew by 10.87%, British Columbia by 14.03%, and Alberta by 17.56%. Together, the 10 provinces yielded an average growth rate of 9.65%.

Then the electoral quotient of the previous redistribution, which was 111,116, is multiplied by that average to get a new quotient of 121,891. Finally, the number of seats initially allocated to each province is calculated by dividing the population number of each province by the new electoral quotient.

That gives us five seats for Newfoundland and Labrador, two for Prince Edward Island, nine for Nova Scotia, seven for New Brunswick, 71 for Quebec, 122 for Ontario, 12 for Manitoba, 10 for Saskatchewan, 37 for Alberta and, finally, 43 for British Columbia, for a total of 318 seats.

It is equally important to note that it is this step that determines whether new members will be added to the House of Commons. Although the average growth rate of the provinces over the past decade was 9.65%, the growth rate of the 10 provinces combined was actually 10.90% for the same period.

When the quotient grows more slowly than Canada, there is an increase in the House. However, if the quotient increases at the same rate as the 10 provinces, there would be no change in the total number of seats. Therefore, if the quotient increases faster than the 10 provinces, there would be a reduction in the total number of seats.

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That means that the location of the growth has a significant influence on the size of the House.

Getting back to the formula, following the calculation of the initial number of seats allocated to the provinces, the second step is to apply the special clauses, namely the senatorial clause and the grandfather clause. This step guarantees that the provinces have no fewer seats than they have in the Senate and no fewer than they had in 1985 in the 33rd Parliament.

This step adds two seats to Newfoundland and Labrador for a total of seven. It adds two seats to Prince Edward Island for a total of four. It adds two seats to Nova Scotia for a total of 11. It adds three seats to New Brunswick for a total of 10. It adds four seats to Quebec for a total of 75. It adds two seats to Manitoba for a total of 14. Finally, it adds four seats to Saskatchewan for a total of 14.

The third step, the representation rule, applies only to a province whose population was overrepresented in the House of Commons after the last redistribution. If such a province becomes overrepresented as a result of the previous calculations, it is allocated additional seats so that its share of seats in the House of Commons is proportional to its share of the population. However, it is important to note that this rule applies to the provinces, not the territories. The latter are therefore not included in the calculations.

The representation rule applies to Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. However, after the second step, Quebec is the only one of these provinces whose number of seats is proportionally smaller than its share of the population. Two seats are therefore added to Quebec, for a total of 77 seats.

At the fourth step, three seats are allocated to the territories. One to the Yukon, one to the Northwest Territories and one to Nunavut. This brings the total number of seats in the House of Commons to 342, as announced by the Chief Electoral Officer.

The formula has been amended many times over the years, most recently in 2011. It is not simply a mathematical calculation based solely on the province's population. This formula protects provinces whose populations are dropping, while still providing for provinces that experience rapid growth to get more seats. In conclusion, it is important to note that the redistribution process, which includes the new distribution of seats, is done independently and normatively to prevent any partisan influence.

• (1355)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I finally get it. I have been listening to my Liberal colleagues react to our speeches and making speeches since this morning.

They are wilfully blind. They read the motion, they understand the motion, but they are twisting the meaning of the motion to—

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

There is a lot of rumbling going on, with a lot of people coming in, but we are still working on a debate.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the Liberals are wilfully blind.

They know it, and they understand the motion. They know that this has nothing to do with the very legitimate process of an independent organization redrawing the electoral map based on demographics and demographic changes. We understand all that. I believe that I am creating a new term. First there was the infamous “mansplaining”, and now we have “Liberalsplaining”. We understand all that. That is not the issue.

The motion we are moving today speaks to the political weight of Quebec as a nation. That is something the House of Commons can legitimately address.

Does my colleague recognize that the House of Commons has the authority to establish that Quebec could systematically have 25% of the seats in the House of Commons through legislation?

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I clearly need to examine that more closely, but it is true that the formula is important. We cannot ignore the formula used to establish the number of seats for each province. It must be taken into account. It is important that we have that discussion. It must be part of the calculation.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

The member spoke a great deal about the mechanics of the process, so I would like to know what position she is taking as an MP from Quebec and a member of the Quebec nation. Simply put, will she vote in favour of the Bloc Québécois motion?

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question.

I would say to her that in my opinion, Quebec absolutely has the right to be well represented. I represent my constituents well, as I am sure she does also.

I think that Quebec is a province that has the right to be well represented in the House of Commons. That being said, we have to look at the process, because Quebec is one of 10 provinces. If this were happening to another province, we would look into it just as attentively.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

FLOODING IN BRAMPTON SOUTH

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, my community of Brampton South experienced some widespread flooding that impacted approximately 100 families. I met with families in Churchville, together with Brampton's fire and emergency services chief, Bill Boyes, and Councillor Palleschi, to see the damage first-hand and to speak to the residents. I would like to thank all the first responders, city workers and community vol-

unteers in Brampton for their hard work in keeping our neighbours safe. My thoughts are with all those who were impacted by the flooding.

Our government has already taken steps to prevent this in the future, with investments like the \$38 million from the disaster mitigation and adaptation fund for the Brampton development project. I know this project will protect our residents and unlock the economic potential of downtown Brampton.

We will continue to work with municipal and provincial partners to ensure that they are properly supported.

* * *

● (1400)

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR WALK

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day as I walk to Parliament Hill, I am shocked at how cold it is. It is freezing. Members can imagine living outside in this cold and imagine living on the streets. Our homelessness crisis in Peterborough—Kawartha continues to soar. We have at least 317 people on our streets.

This past weekend, one man's mission united dozens of people who donated their time and money to take part in the Coldest Night of the Year walk in support of a new charity: Street Level Advocacy. Scott Couper, the founder, walks the streets of Peterborough every day, connecting with people living on the street. He set a goal to raise \$20,000, but the charity raised over \$28,000. Money raised will go toward helping the homeless and a strategic plan to get people off the streets and into permanent housing.

I thank all those who participated. The power of one is the power of many. Empathy plus action is how we change the world.

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ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 1 marks UN Zero Discrimination Day, a time to celebrate the right of everyone to live a life full of authenticity and dignity. This year's theme, “Remove laws that harm, create laws that empower”, is a reminder that we all have a responsibility to make fairer laws that leave no one behind.

We have done much, like banning conversion therapy, which was passed unanimously in the House, but we have more to do. Last week, I was pleased to welcome the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion to my riding of Vancouver Granville for a round table on diversity and inclusion with a broad range of community organizations, all of which expressed their worry about the rise of discrimination in our society. We must hear these voices.

On this UN Zero Discrimination Day, I encourage everyone to reflect on the important work we still need to do to make our communities free of discrimination in all its forms.

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[Translation]

SYLVAIN RACINE

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Sylvain Racine and his immense contribution to the development of community television in Les Moulins.

Sylvain has not only been a community television professional, but also a stalwart supporter. He started in 1983 as a volunteer and saw TVRM through its experimental stage, when staff were creating content with whatever they had on hand. He enjoyed the experience so much that he worked his way up to general manager in 1997 and stayed there until quite recently, in addition to serving on the board of directors of the Fédération des télévisions communautaires autonomes du Québec.

Sylvain shaped TVRM in his own image, making it dynamic, supportive, unifying and solidly anchored in the community. In addition to giving many young journalists a chance to pursue their passion, he helped TVRM grow, strengthen its foundations, and become a key player in our civic democracy, a role I hope it will continue to fulfill for a long time to come.

Happy retirement, Sylvain.

* * *

IRISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the efforts of the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, I have the honour today to help launch Canada's first Irish Heritage Month.

It is an opportunity for us to join together to celebrate the contributions of the Irish people to our democratic and prosperous country.

One of the co-founders of our country was a great Irishman, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, the member of Parliament for Montreal West. Thomas D'Arcy McGee was renowned for his talents as an impassioned orator and for his defence of the integrity of the brand new Canadian Confederation. That was the reason he was assassinated on April 7, 1868, just a few steps from here on Sparks Street, following an evening debate here in the House.

I invite all my colleagues to raise a glass and salute the contributions of all Irish people in Canada.

Sláinte.

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[English]

ANNIVERSARY CONGRATULATIONS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I stand in the House during a very difficult time in Canada and around the world, but I want to share some incredible news. Next month, a very special couple from London, Ontario,

Statements by Members

will be reaching multiple significant milestones. Geoffrey and Pauline Jell will be celebrating 80 years of marriage. Pauline will hit the beautiful age of 99 and her dear spouse will turn 100.

I want to take members back 80 years to when Geoffrey and Pauline were first married in the U.K. Six months after their nuptials, Geoffrey was sent overseas with his company, the Royal Engineers, 8th Army, commonly known as the Desert Rats. Geoffrey trained new recruits on pneumatic equipment, refurbished a power plant and cleared mines during his time in the Middle Eastern desert. Geoffrey was wounded by an Italian hand grenade in Sicily during the latter part of the war, but he shared that his biggest challenges awaited him in England after 1946, when there was no work, no money and they lived in a hut. The Jells moved to South Africa for 10 years and then moved to Canada in 1966. Now Geoffrey enjoys visiting schools to teach Canadian kids about the Second World War.

To Geoffrey and Pauline, best wishes for a very incredible 80th anniversary. Happy 100th to Geoffrey. Happy 99th to Pauline. I look forward to celebrating with them.

* * *

● (1405)

UKRAINE

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Vladimir Putin has chosen to walk in the footsteps of Joseph Stalin. Stalin once said that a million deaths is a statistic; a single death is a tragedy. Certainly, behind the statistic we are seeing coming out of Ukraine, there are a lot of tragedies: a mother and father being told that a child has died and a child finding out that their father will never be seen again. Ukraine, of course, has borne the vast brunt of the suffering, but let us not forget the Russian mothers and fathers who are hoping that their sons and daughters come home from Ukraine. All this tragedy has been perpetrated by Vladimir Putin and his supporters.

To all my family back in the Ukraine, many of whom are waiting with their guns for the Russians to come, to their families who are praying and hoping for them, to all the Ukrainians and to the many Russians who oppose Vladimir Putin, I support them, my family supports them and Canada supports them. In fact, all good people in the world support them and the House supports them.

Slava Ukraini.

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MARTHA LOUISE BLACK

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the recent birthday of Martha Louise Black, an extraordinary Yukoner who was born on February 24, 156 years ago.

In 1898, Martha left her American home to join the thousands of men and women heading to the Klondike to lay claim to gold, discovering she was pregnant as she laboured up and over the Chilkoot Pass. Martha never found her promised gold, but gave birth to her third child in Yukon, fell in love with the territory and stayed. She became a successful business woman and naturalist.

Statements by Members

Having remarried in her new home, Martha ran to become Yukon's member of Parliament after her husband, George Black, resigned because of ill health. She became Canada's second female MP in 1935. Martha Black recalls having to travel by airplane, steamer, horse and rowboat to reach her constituents. She served her adopted territory until 1940, stating, "I represent no political party. I represent the people of the Yukon."

With the challenges Canada now faces, we have little room for purely partisan politics. As a remarkable and intrepid Yukoner and a skilled parliamentarian, Martha Black can be an inspiration to us all in the House.

* * *

UKRAINE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Vladimir Putin's barbaric and illegal invasion of Ukraine is an international war crime and a crime against humanity. Putin is killing civilians with carpet bombing and cluster munitions, and there are now several reports that he has used thermobaric warheads. Shopping malls, day cares and schools are among his targets, proving to the world that Putin is nothing but a despot and a warlord.

He must be made a pariah on the international stage. Russia cannot be permitted to remain in the international community. Putin and his inner circle must be investigated and swiftly brought to justice before the International Criminal Court for these atrocities.

The bravery and tenacity of the people of Ukraine attacked by Vladimir Putin are inspiring. They are fighting and dying on the front lines and must be recognized as true heroes.

Canada and our allies can leave nothing on the table in the fight for human rights, the rule of law, democracy and our collective civil liberties. We must not allow dictators like Putin to redraw borders through force. Ukraine is holding the line for western democracy and the free world. The future depends on what we do now.

* * *

● (1410)

UKRAINE

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand in this House to add my voice to the countless Canadians, of all faiths and backgrounds, who are shocked and angered by Putin's unjust, unprovoked, illegal attack on Ukraine. It is incredibly hard to see the images of families torn apart and the grave loss of lives and destruction.

This invasion has repercussions for us all because this is not an attack on one. It is an attack on democracy, on international law, on human rights and on freedom. It threatens peace and order in Europe and around the world. Canada has made it clear that these unwarranted actions will not go unpunished. We are providing financial aid, cybersecurity support and both lethal and non-lethal equipment, and we have imposed some of the severest sanctions Canada has ever imposed.

Canada must continue to do everything it can to help Ukraine in its darkest hour. I would also like to highlight that, although these

days have been dark, we have seen a bright light shining strong in Ukraine and that is the light of its people, led by their extraordinary leader, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Their bravery has inspired us all.

Slava Ukraini.

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ARCTIC SOVEREIGNTY

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Putin's invasion of Ukraine should be a wake-up call to all of us that we cannot take our Arctic sovereignty for granted. NORAD commander General Glen VanHerck recently warned that delaying the updating of our outdated northern defences leaves us all at risk. Canada, like Ukraine, shares a border with Russia, a border that is poorly defined and today is in dispute.

University of Calgary professor Robert Huebert said recently, "Any myth that the Russia of old, the aggressor expansionary Russia had been a thing of the past" has been laid to rest. He says, "It tells us that the Russians are, in fact, willing to use any means possible to seize the territory of a sovereign state."

Now is the time for the government to finally start listening to the warnings of military officials and modernize, not just maintain, NORAD's early warning system. When is the government going to start taking our Arctic security and our Canadian sovereignty seriously?

* * *

MENTAL HEALTH

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last few years have been incredibly tough. For most of us, our mental health is not where it should be and many around us are really struggling.

Everyone should remember the name BeThere.org. It is the award-winning Canadian brain child of jack.org and, quite simply, a tool the world needs to know about right now. Its five golden rules are a must for anyone who loves someone who might at some time need help, in other words, all of us.

Number one is "Say what you see". Something as simple as, "I have not seen you in class the past few days. Is everything okay?" might be enough to start a life-saving conversation with someone. Number two is "Show you care". Number three is "Hear them out". Number four is "Know your role". Number five is "Connect to help".

Each evidence-based rule is laid out simply and brilliantly at BeThere.org. Please check it out today. Someone we love is counting on us to be there.

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[Translation]

FRANCOPHONIE MONTH

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every March, we come together to celebrate Francophonie Month.

I invite everyone to celebrate the diversity and richness of the Francophonie and to show our solidarity as an important part of the global Francophonie. In my home city of Halifax, local organizations will be hosting many activities and presentations throughout the month of March to showcase the richness of our local French-speaking community and contribute to its development.

I was proud to support that development in my previous roles by introducing the first francophone immigration action plan for Nova Scotia. I am also proud today to see that our new immigration plan recognizes the importance of increasing francophone immigration.

To all those celebrating in Halifax West and elsewhere, happy Francophonie Month.

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[English]

TRIBUTES

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to two great Canadians we have lost in recent weeks.

Darwin Benson spent his life making Canada a better place to work and live. He worked for years in the labour movement, and then spent his retirement volunteering at food banks and as a hospice driver taking patients to doctor's appointments. Darwin was an honorary lifetime member of the NDP and worked tirelessly on 26 campaigns over the years. Darwin was my friend, but then Darwin was everyone's friend.

I would also like to pay tribute to Jeff Hutchings, a friend and colleague who passed away far too young at the end of January. Jeff was a renowned biologist at Dalhousie University, and he was one of the most outspoken and effective defenders of science in Canada. Jeff was brilliant, articulate and likeable, but he was fierce when it came to using good science to create good government policy.

We are all poorer for the loss of Darwin and Jeff. I and many others will miss them dearly.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

YVAN ROY

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the community of Barraute is in mourning for its mayor, Yvan Roy, who passed away recently surrounded by his loved ones at the Montreal Heart Institute.

Statements by Members

Mr. Roy was elected as mayor of Barraute for the first time in 2017, after working as a member of the municipal council for about 10 years. He was re-elected last November and had just started his second term in office.

He was the founding president of the Foire du camionneur and was instrumental in the event's success, having remained committed to the project for 14 years.

He also did a lot of other things for the community, including setting up entrepreneurial greenhouses so that the community could have a local market, creating the economic development committee and implementing composting services. He was also involved in the Abitibi RCM.

The region has lost a remarkable man who was loved by all. I extend my sincere condolences to the family, the municipal council and staff, and all residents of Barraute who are all mourning this great loss.

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[English]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our energy security policy is as important as our defence strategy. The war in Ukraine has unmasked the foolishness of the Liberals' green energy policy that would see Canada's oil and gas sector destroyed while increasing our reliance on foreign oil from countries with poor human rights records.

Canadians still use oil, and we have enough in our country to be self-sufficient without importing it from dictator regimes. Canadian oil and gas can replace Russian oil and provide energy security to our allies when it matters, and it matters now, right now, when Russian oil is fuelling an unjustified war and creating refugees and a humanitarian crisis.

Canadian energy, exported to our allies, would hamstring illegal wars while creating jobs, growing the middle class and supporting Canadian families. Now is the time for Canada to step up to the plate by getting our oil and gas to the market.

* * *

IRISH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, March 1 marks the launch of Irish Heritage Month.

Last March 10, this chamber unanimously adopted my motion. I am grateful to the House for its support in recognizing the many contributions that Canadians of Irish descent have made to building this country into what it is today.

Oral Questions

The political and economic relationships between our two countries are strong, and the cultural ties run deep. The point of Irish Heritage Month is not green hats and green beer. It is about honouring the close bond between our two countries that is embedded in our past, and it is about celebrating a bright future between our two countries.

Ireland and Canada share the same values. We have a long history of promoting democratic values and human rights. This year I am asking all Irish Canadians to dedicate our month to Ukraine and to Ukrainian Canadians. I ask that they do what they are best at: stand up, reach out and lend a hand. Unity is strength.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, MPs came together to express their support for Ukraine and their disgust for Putin and what he is doing. One of the things that we asked the government to do to reflect that is to expel the Russian ambassador.

The Deputy Prime Minister, yesterday, said, "Silence is complicity and following orders is not an excuse." We would agree with that. In light of the silence from the Russian ambassador, will the government expel the Russian ambassador and recall our ambassador back to Canada?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Russia's egregious and unprovoked attack on Ukraine is a direct challenge to democracy. It is why the Minister of Foreign Affairs summoned the Russian ambassador to express extreme concern and disagreement with Russia's actions.

Canada will continue to use all tools at its disposal to make sure that these illegal acts are not left unpunished. The people of Ukraine have the right to their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to live free without fear.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we expect the government to take serious action and expel that ambassador.

Thousands of Ukrainians have fled their country and they are searching for safety. Ukrainians do not want to be permanent refugees. They want to return to their home, a sovereign and democratic Ukraine, but they need protection now.

Canada has always been a welcoming place for those displaced by war. Will the Prime Minister commit today to allowing visa-free travel for Ukrainians who are wanting to come to Canada and find a safe haven?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is steadfast in its support for the sovereignty and territo-

rial integrity of Ukraine. We have been priority processing applications from Ukraine and bolstering operational capacity in the region, which has allowed us to approve more applications from Ukrainian nationals.

In addition to establishing a dedicated service channel for Ukraine, inquiries regarding Ukraine are prioritized and we are continuing to work on more measures, as the situation unfolds, that will ensure that Ukrainians can flee to safety.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a little hard getting a direct answer from the Prime Minister today. Let us try another question.

Safety, security and sovereignty must all be top priorities for any government, and it should be Canada's priority, especially now. The longer Canadian oil, gas and LNG stay in the ground, the bigger Putin's wallet gets and the more countries like Ukraine and others will continue to be hurt and threatened by Russian aggression. More than ever, the world needs Canadian energy.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to changing his political direction, and will he begin to support the extraction and exportation of Canadian oil, gas and LNG?

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have been there for Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador and their energy sectors. We are actually moving forward with the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, which the Conservatives could not get approved and could not get built. We are going to continue to work to ensure that we are supporting workers in the energy industry, even as we ensure that we are moving forward in ways that reduce carbon from our atmosphere and create a better future with good jobs for everyone.

Canada has a significant role to play in the world. We will continue to play it with Europe and with other allies as well.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister invoked the Emergencies Act on February 14, Conservatives and others said it clearly did not meet the legal threshold. Legal tools were already available to move the trucks from Ottawa. The Prime Minister moved ahead to invoke the act and even attached confidence to the vote. Less than 48 hours after that vote, he revoked it, which proves he used the Emergencies Act for his own political gain.

Is it not true the Prime Minister used a legislative sledgehammer on our country for his own political advantage?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Emergencies Act enabled local authorities to end the illegal blockades. We have heard from the commissioner of the RCMP, police chiefs, experts and political leadership that it was essential to the police response, and that it offered precision and clarity as they did their important work.

Even after all this has ended, Conservative MPs still cannot pick a lane. Canadians want to know: Do they stand with blockaders or do they stand with Canadian communities?

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HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a lane we would like the Prime Minister to pick from. Today is March 1 and, as of today, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia have all lifted their vaccine mandates and other provinces are following suit. Why? Because it is safe to do so and they care about mental health and their economies.

Here at the federal level, we have a Liberal government that is dragging its knuckles because it has become so backward and regressive in its thinking when it comes to the need for restrictions. When will the Liberals come out of the dark ages and see that vaccine mandates are so yesterday? When are they going to go remove the federal mandates?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we ground our decisions in science. We continue to believe that keeping Canadians safe is extremely important. However, I will highlight that Canada has made significant movements on restrictions at the border to enable more Canadians to travel safely and less onerously when they come home. We will continue to look carefully at other measures we can lift or move forward on to ensure that Canadians continue to be safe while getting back to the things they love. Canadians expect their governments to keep them safe. That is exactly what we are doing.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Russian tyrant's pride has been wounded and now he is waging a brutal, extremely violent attack on a peaceful people.

The international community, including Canada, has imposed very strong sanctions, which I applaud. However, those sanctions must not be temporary measures that, after a quick victory, enable the Russian tyrant to save face.

Do we agree that the sanctions must be maintained until the last Russian soldier has left Ukraine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his stance.

We could not agree more. This is not just about the territorial integrity of Ukraine. It is about the rule of law and the principles be-

hind the United Nations and the Charter. We need to be there to uphold those principles, and we will keep the sanctions in place until Russia recognizes that it made a huge mistake and withdraws its soldiers from every part of Ukraine.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): I appreciate that answer, Mr. Speaker.

There is another issue.

Does the Prime Minister agree that, in any circumstance, especially given what we are witnessing in Ukraine, it would be irresponsible to use the war and its humanitarian consequences as an opportunity to promote oil exports from western Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Canada, we import negligible amounts of Russian oil and gas. That was blocked with the sanctions we imposed a few days ago.

The fact is, Europe still relies very heavily on Russian oil and gas. We, the whole world, have to try to give Europe alternatives to what Russia has to offer. We know very well that we are moving towards net zero for the global economy, but we are not there yet. We will be there with the resources needed to help our European friends.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ukrainians are facing a disastrous crisis. Canada must stand up to President Putin and his unjust, unprovoked war. The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions on Belarus for its role in this war.

Is the Prime Minister ready to introduce sanctions against Belarus?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we announced sanctions against Russia several days ago, but we also added sanctions against Belarus, because we know that it was an accomplice and even a partner in this invasion of Ukraine.

Our sanctions against the Belarusian government and the oligarchs who profit from it are present and severe. We will always keep trying to do more to sanction Belarus for its complicity.

*Oral Questions**[English]***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are witnessing a humanitarian crisis unfold in Ukraine, and Canada has to do everything we can in our power to support people in need. One of the things we can do is support Ukrainians who are seeking refuge in Canada. Will the Prime Minister commit to a simple, straightforward, barrier-free process for Ukrainians who are seeking solace and refuge in Canada?

● (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past number of weeks, seeing the terrifying possibility of what has come to pass, we have actually been preparing with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and our consular resources to ensure there are capacities to treat Ukrainian requests much more quickly. We are processing a higher number of visas and permits and we are looking at creating new programs to further fast-track applications of people who are fleeing from this terrible conflict. Canada will always stand with Ukrainians.

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*[Translation]***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in these times of crisis, Canadians deserve real answers from their government.

Today, instead of answering when asked if Canada intends to expel the Russian ambassador, the Prime Minister evaded the question. Yesterday, when she was asked the same question, the Minister of Finance said that everything was on the table.

Let us see what is on the table. For six days Ukraine has been invaded, for six days Putin's regime has violated international law, and for six days the Russian ambassador has been silent and complicit in war crimes.

Does the government plan to expel the Russian ambassador from Canada and recall our ambassador from Moscow, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Russia's egregious and unprovoked attack on Ukraine is a direct challenge to all of us, to the international rules-based order, to democracy and to people who care about human rights and social justice everywhere.

That is why our foreign affairs minister summoned the ambassador from Russia to hear her opinion immediately and directly. Canada will continue to have that dialogue but will also remind Russia every day of its responsibilities, of the absolute need for Russia to stand up and be accountable, and Russia will be punished.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I put the question to the Prime Minister, but I did not get an answer. The Minister of Finance was asked the question, but there was no answer. The parliamentary secretary was sent to tell us that there

was no answer and that the ambassador had been called in for a slap on the wrist.

We have moved beyond that. For six days, this ambassador has been an accomplice of the Putin regime. For six days, he has been complicit in war crimes. When will the government expel this ambassador and recall our ambassador from Moscow?

[English]

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Russia's actions, Mr. Putin's actions, will not go unpunished.

When we talk about what we have done, let us talk about the sanctions. Let us talk about the military aid. Let us talk about humanitarian assistance. Let us talk about standing with the people of Ukraine and doing absolutely everything in our power to make sure that Russia is punished, that Russia withdraws immediately and that we have a ceasefire and peace.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation for Ukrainians is dire. Many Canadians of Ukrainian heritage are worried about their family members trying to flee the war. One person called the Ukraine hotline to ask about his parents' PR application. He was told that someone from Ukraine who applied a year or two ago had no priority.

Instead of having those in need get stuck in this Liberal-made immigration backlog, will the minister commit to visa-free travel for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters trying to flee war?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Ukraine is characterized by unspeakable violence, and we condemn in the harshest terms this war of choice by President Putin.

That is why we started preparing more than a month ago by boosting our operational capacity in the region. It is why we extended a dedicated service channel to provide reliable information. It is why we created a new pathway for people who are already in Canada to make it easier for them to stay and work. It is why, in the very near future, we will have new measures to welcome more Ukrainians who are seeking safety as they flee this war.

Canada will be there for Ukraine in its time of need. Ukraine deserves nothing less.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today at the citizenship and immigration committee we agreed to pass a motion in support of Ukraine, including calling for visa-free travel. The Liberals voted against it. All opposition parties are calling on the government to implement visa-free travel for Ukrainians.

Despite the security processes already in place for people arriving without visas and at customs and considering our national security system, why is the Liberal government against visa-free travel for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters fleeing war?

• (1435)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that all members of this House and all parties want nothing more than to support Ukraine in its time of need. That is why we have introduced new measures to expedite application processing, and 4,000 applications across our lines of business have already been approved. It is why we have introduced new measures to make it easier to stay.

My interest, and I am sure the hon. member shares this perspective, is to create a program that will get the greatest number of Ukrainians to Canada as quickly and safely as possible. In the very near future I will have more to say and a plan that will achieve those ends.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the government for sending anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, which the Conservatives have been calling for since 2018. I know that Ukraine will make good use of the 100 Carl Gustaf anti-armour weapons that we are delivering now. Non-NATO partners like Sweden have also stepped up and are sending 5,000 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine.

Additionally, Ukraine needs more medical supplies that Canada currently has in storage. Will the Minister of National Defence send Ukraine additional weapons, improved first aid kits and role 3 hospitals that Canada has?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me just be clear that all options continue to be on the table in terms of our support, but we should recognize that we have sent support: \$10 million of lethal and non-lethal aid, \$25 million of non-lethal aid and then, just yesterday, as the member rightly pointed out, more anti-tank weapons, as well as ammunition for those weapons.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Russia attacked Ukraine in 2014, Stephen Harper indicated that Canada should be prepared to respond to potential Russian incursions into our territory.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, the Defence Minister said she would work with U.S. partners to ensure that NORAD gets modernized. In other words, the Liberals have done nothing since 2015.

This morning, there are reports in the media that Russia is amassing troops and armaments in the Arctic. Canada's sovereignty is at stake. When will the Minister reveal to Canadians her plan to modernize the North Warning System?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Canada will continue to work with our American partners. That is why we have committed \$252.2 million through the end of the 2021 budget as an initial investment. We will continue to talk with our partners, including the United States, and we will continue to protect our Arctic sovereignty.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are exploiting the war in Ukraine to sell dirty oil and gas. Their solution is to build pipelines across Quebec to export more fossil fuels to Europe.

The UN Secretary-General is not on board though. He said, "As current events make all too clear, our reliance on fossil fuels makes the global economy and our energy security vulnerable to geopolitical crises....now is the time to accelerate the transition to a renewable energy future." That is from the UN Secretary-General. They did not listen though, so they do not know.

Does the government realize that reliance on fossil fuels is destabilizing the world?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and all her work on environmental issues and climate change over the past few years.

I think she and I agree, along with governments around the world, that we have to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels for environmental reasons, for climate reasons, to create the jobs we need in the near and far future and, of course, to reduce our dependence on countries like Russia.

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the UN Secretary-General also commented on the terrifying IPCC report released yesterday, calling it an atlas of human suffering because it maps out areas where half the world's population will be devastated by climate change. Half the world's population is at risk, which is serious.

This brings us back to the choice the Minister of the Environment has to make on Friday. He must decide whether to approve the Bay du Nord oil project, which seeks to extract 300 million barrels. Will he say no to Bay du Nord?

Oral Questions

● (1440)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague once again. The Impact Assessment Agency assessed the Bay du Nord project. The project is under review by our government. We will make a decision as soon as possible.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is an answer that keeps being postponed. The UN Secretary-General has made a lot of statements. He said that the world's biggest polluters are guilty of arson on our only home and that this abdication of leadership is criminal.

We expect leadership from the minister, who has set the bar very high. We have expectations of him. I repeat the question. It is very simple, and it is time to answer it: Will he approve the Bay du Nord oil project, yes or no?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talks about leadership.

In the last four years, our government has done the most of any government to fight climate change. We have invested \$100 billion and introduced over 100 measures to fight climate change. We fought for carbon pricing all the way to the Supreme Court, something our government, hers and mine, fought for.

Leadership on climate change is on this side of the House.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in 2015, the Liberals ran on a platform of transparency. They said, “government and its information should be open by default” and that they would “restore trust in democracy”. Parliament is setting up a committee to review their use of the Emergencies Act, and it is critically important that the official opposition has the power to hold the government to account.

Instead, the Liberal government is being obstructionist and undermining our ability to do our duty to Canadians. Why is the government so afraid of accountability?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am confused. The party opposite will have three members of their caucus, and they are cheering that. They are very happy that they will have the same number that the government has. The opposition, unfortunately, decided to cheerlead the illegal activities that were happening outside. It would be entirely inappropriate for those who were cheerleading the type of activities that we saw, the illegal blockades and the illegal occupation, to be chairing.

What we said instead is that two opposition parties will chair the process, one who is against the act and one who is for the act. That is being reasonable. That is being fair.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has called Canadians he disagrees with people with unacceptable views, racists, bigots, misogynists, terrorists and people that take up space.

Yesterday, the public safety minister even said that protesters were rapists. Experts say that there was no such security threat or financial threat to Canadians.

Given the Prime Minister voted for it, then revoked it in 36 hours, will the Liberals finally admit that imposing the Emergencies Act was wrong?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as events unfold in the world that are deeply serious in Ukraine, and as we have finally been able to put the illegal blockades and the occupation behind us, I would hope that the members opposite would look at the efficacy of the Emergencies Act and how successful it was in restoring peace and order. Their questions might now be on things that are more pressing in the world.

The Speaker: I just want to clarify that, when members are asking or answering a question, they can shout as long as they want. However, when they are not recognized, and therefore not allowed to, I would prefer that they not shout at each other.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the story of a protest that dragged on because of the inaction of a Prime Minister who did nothing for three weeks. It was disappointing.

Suddenly, on February 14, this Prime Minister invoked the Emergencies Act. Three days of debate followed. On February 21, the Liberals and the NDP voted in favour of that legislation. On Wednesday, February 23, this Prime Minister contradicted himself by saying that what had been urgent was no longer urgent, and he revoked the act.

Can he tell us what happened between Monday and Wednesday to make him do that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

From the beginning of the protest, from the beginning of the illegal blockade, the government took many concrete measures. We added resources and, yes, we did invoke the Emergencies Act, but we did so as a last resort and on the advice of the police. We then revoked the act. A great deal of progress has been made, and we will continue to increase resources to protect public safety.

● (1445)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was nothing left in the streets of Ottawa.

The border crossings at Coutts, Emerson and Windsor were cleared without the use of the Emergencies Act. Here in Ottawa, the Prime Minister waited three weeks and then decided one morning that he would invoke the Emergencies Act. Late once again, when there was nothing left in the streets of Ottawa, the NDP and the Liberals voted in favour of this legislation last Monday. Two days later, the Prime Minister did an about-face and revoked it.

I have a simple question. What happened?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Emergencies Act was essential for allowing law enforcement to end the blockades and protests across the country.

We always said that we would not keep the Emergencies Act in effect a minute longer than necessary, and we kept that promise last week. As we said from day one, we will take the advice of agencies on enforcing the act, and we will give them the tools that they need.

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[English]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the IPCC report released yesterday has a stark warning: Either we take action now on mitigation and adaptation for climate change, or we risk suffering even more severe consequences from extreme weather events, wildfires and floods.

However, the government continues to give the fossil fuel industry billions of dollars in subsidies. Instead of bankrolling the multi-national oil and gas companies, could the Liberals not fund the infrastructure our communities need to help prevent catastrophe?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IPCC report shows what people around the world have known for a long time, that countries need to take bold action to fight climate change.

We continue to cut emissions, and we have cut 30 million tonnes since we have come into power. That is almost half of Quebec's entire emissions, which we managed to reduce because of the hundreds of measures we have put in place, and because of the \$100 billion in investments. However, we recognize, as the members opposite do, that we need to do more.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the latest IPCC report, the window is closing for us to secure a livable future for our children and grandchildren. The report is chilling.

According to experts, the climate crisis has already caused irreversible damage. Global warming is happening too fast, and all this Liberal government has to offer is empty rhetoric. First the Liberals bought a pipeline, and now they continue to subsidize the major polluters in the oil and gas industry, the worst in the G20.

When will the Prime Minister stop subsidizing fossil fuels and protect Canadians now and for generations to come?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Oral Questions

The IPCC report confirms what people around the world already know. Every country needs to do more, be more ambitious, to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We need to continue to lower emissions and build resilience.

This is why our government has already invested \$2.3 billion in climate change adaptation and more than \$100 billion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the past few years. Every single one of us, both here in Canada and around the world, must do more.

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[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are struggling to find affordable housing, including those in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. The need for affordable housing has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last week, I had the honour of speaking at a virtual open house for one of our government's rapid housing initiative programs in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. Could the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion please tell the House how our government is building more affordable housing in Kitchener South—Hespeler and across Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her very strong advocacy on the issue of affordable housing. Recently in the member's riding, we announced \$8.2 million to create 42 new, permanent, affordable housing units for seniors and women at risk of, and in fact experiencing, homelessness. This is real action. It means 42 Canadians now have the housing that they need and a safe place to call home. This is yet another example of the national housing strategy at work in communities from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

● (1450)

HEALTH

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been plagued with backlogs throughout this pandemic, everything from immigration applications, to GIS payments, to parental benefits. Yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board said in the House that 99% of public servants are vaccinated.

Oral Questions

I have a simple question for the minister. How many unvaccinated federal employees did she have to fire to get to 99%?

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, vaccines are the best way to bring this pandemic to an end. Public servants stepped up and 99% got their first dose, 98.7% got their second dose.

Public servants are responding to the need of making sure Canadians are safe and healthy during this pandemic. Those who need accommodation are being treated, and we will continue to make sure that these public servants are respected.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in question period, the health minister praised the Province of Saskatchewan on its COVID-19 efforts. As of Monday, all COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted in my province. Businesses can fully open and smiles can be shared between the people of Saskatchewan once again. Canada has some of the highest vaccination rates in the world.

When will the health minister follow the lead of the science-backed provincial health authority and lift all federal mandates?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a word that comes to my mind is “gratefulness”. I am grateful for our relationship with Minister Merriman and the entire Government of Saskatchewan, who have been there to help the people of Saskatchewan get through this crisis, and I am grateful to the millions of people in Saskatchewan who made the right choice and got vaccinated.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Beauce borders the United States.

Mr. Quirion, a voter in my riding, has informed me of the unfair treatment he continues to experience at the border. His son lives a few minutes away in Maine, but he can seldom visit him because of the current border measures. He is fully vaccinated but is still required to provide a rapid test just for a one-day visit. The closest testing site to his son is more than an hour's drive away.

When will the government present a plan to permanently end these mandates for vaccinated individuals?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said all along, our government will continue to follow the advice of scientists and public health experts.

The good news is that yesterday we eased our border measures. That is great news for travellers, the tourism sector, our aviation sector and communities along the borders.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Tourism Industry Association would disagree greatly with the minister.

An ER nurse sent me a message yesterday because she is in isolation. Her ER is desperately understaffed and she is stuck at home with zero symptoms because she was randomly selected to do a PCR test at the border, on top of the rapid test. Canadians need a

plan. They need answers. Provinces across the country are following the advice of medical health officers and dropping mandates.

When will the Prime Minister give Canadians a plan and a timeline on when federal vaccine mandates will be dropped?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians support doing everything we can at our borders to protect the health and safety of Canadians, and also to protect our economy. Prior to yesterday, we were testing all arriving non-U.S. travellers to make sure that incomers were fully vaccinated and not carrying the virus.

Yesterday we changed these measures. Based on advice we received from public health experts, we no longer test every traveller, and we are now accepting antigen tests for travellers. That is great news for travellers.

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were eager to read the new bill to modernize the Official Languages Act.

Quebec's one request was that it wanted to be solely responsible for linguistic planning in its territory. The Liberals have said no. Ottawa is interfering again. It is ensuring that its legislation will override the application of the Charter of the French Language. It will be optional for federally regulated businesses.

Why not simply let Bill 101 apply in Quebec as Quebec has requested?

• (1455)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

Promoting and protecting the French language is a top priority for our government. Today, I had the great pleasure and honour of tabling our bill to modernize and strengthen official languages. This means that we recognize the decline of French in Canada and even in Quebec, and that is—

The Speaker: Order.

We are having technical difficulties. We will try to resolve the situation.

In the meantime, I believe that the Minister of Canadian Heritage can answer the question.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, defending and promoting French is and always will be a top priority for the Government of Canada.

In the bill, we recognize that we need to do more. We need to support French, whether as a language of work or a language of service. We are doing just that, not only in Quebec but across the country. We will always be there to defend French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec National Assembly is calling for this, as are the Government of Quebec and all living former premiers of Quebec, namely, Pierre Marc Johnson, Daniel Johnson, Lucien Bouchard, Pauline Marois, Philippe Couillard, and even the very Liberal Jean Charest.

Even the House of Commons voted in favour of it at second reading. Only the Liberal government is opposed.

Will the minister amend the bill so that Bill 101 applies to federally regulated businesses in Quebec?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is intervening in its own jurisdiction. It is taking action to strengthen French as a language of work and a language of service, not only in Quebec but in francophone communities across Canada because the French fact is a Canadian fact.

We want to protect and promote French not only in Quebec but everywhere. We want more French. We want to speak French, read French and listen to French music. That is why we are taking action.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Angus Reid, 53% of Canadians cannot keep up with the cost of living, and things are going to get worse. The next budget will introduce significant amounts of new spending and make inflation worse for Canadian families, and on April 1, the government is increasing the carbon tax on gasoline by almost nine cents a litre. Every day, we hear more stories of Canadians telling us they are getting squeezed.

When will the government realize it needs to change its course and cancel its tax-and-spending plans?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to talk down the Canadian economy with a false economic narrative, so I am glad to have the chance to share some good news. StatsCan today released our GDP numbers for the fourth quarter. Canada's GDP grew at an annualized rate of 6.7%. That is the second-highest level in the G7, and it beat market expectations.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Liberals about inflation in Saskatchewan, and the government confirmed the negative impact of inflation on the poverty line throughout my province. In fact, the poverty rate increased 1.2% in Saskatchewan and it is only going to get worse. That means an additional 13,000 people in Saskatchewan are falling into poverty every year, simply because inflation is driving their costs through the roof.

Oral Questions

Why is the government driving low-income families in Saskatoon West deeper into poverty with its high-spending, high-inflation policies?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable people in Canada. We introduced the CCB, which is indexed to inflation and lifted almost 300,000 children out of poverty. We increased the GIS, also indexed to inflation, which has helped over 900,000 seniors. In fact, when we formed government, there were 5.1 million Canadians in poverty. By 2019 that figure had dropped to 3.7 million.

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● (1500)

HOUSING

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the communities of Flamborough—Glanbrook have grown exponentially as young families flee Toronto in search of a more affordable life, except now they are feeling the crunch here, too. In January, the Realtors Association of Hamilton-Burlington confirmed that the average house price in the Hamilton area was over \$1 million.

With interest rate hikes on the horizon, when will we see the long-promised housing plan to address this crisis, and what hope can the government offer young Canadians who have given up on the dream of home ownership?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member to enable his party to actually vote for the measures we have brought in to enable affordability. The party opposite voted against the vacancy tax that we were supposed to move forward on. It voted against measures to help first-time homebuyers. It voted against measures to improve more investments in affordable housing. These are the things we are doing, and we will not only continue to invest in affordable housing for the most vulnerable, but we will also continue to put in place measures to encourage more Canadians to turn from renters into homeowners.

I hope the member opposite and his party can support us.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last two years of this pandemic have underscored the importance of investing in domestic manufacturing of vaccines and personal protective equipment and, therefore, supporting science and research in Canada. It is also important to provide Canadians with options, which is why I am pleased to rise in the House today to ask about the first Canadian-made, plant-based COVID-19 vaccine, the Medicago vaccine, which was approved by Health Canada on February 24.

Can the Minister of Health outline how the government is supporting the use of this vaccine?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent for her excellent question and her excellent work.

Last Thursday, Medicago's Covifenz vaccine was approved by Health Canada. It is the first Canadian vaccine approved by Health Canada. It is also the first approved vaccine in the world to use plant-based technologies. The work of Medicago's workers and partners is giving Canadians one more tool to protect their health and safety. It is good news all around.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Liberals, all winery, cidery, brewery and distillery owners will wake up on April 1 to an increase in their excise taxes. Most owners I have talked to have struggled along due to perpetual lockdowns. Most do not fall within Bill C-2's benefits, and any potential offset does not come close to bridging their losses. One winery owner I spoke to will have a \$50,000 excise tax hit.

Unlike the finance minister, I have owned my own small business and I have had to read financial statements. Will the minister cancel the April Fool's Day excise tax increase?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like other taxes and benefits, the alcohol excise duty rate is automatically adjusted each year. This approach provides certainty to the sector while ensuring our tax system is there for all Canadians.

Let me tell the members that if the member opposite really wanted to support Canada's small business owners, she and her party should have voted with us to support the business-support measures that helped Canadian small businesses get through COVID.

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 1, the price of alcohol will go up yet again for Canadians due to the Liberals' ever-increasing escalator tax grab on beer, wine and spirits. Canadian restaurants and bars will continue to struggle due to the impacts of the pandemic. Another tax hike is the last thing they need. This automatic, permanent tax increase must be reviewed by Parliament every year so we can support the places that serve Canadian alcohol and the farmers and producers who make it.

Will the Liberals put a cork in their ever-increasing excise tax on Canadian alcohol?

• (1505)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the increase is less than one-fifth of one penny per can of beer, and there are specific measures that take into consideration the needs of craft brewers and wineries.

Let me tell the members opposite something else. They should have paid attention to Wine Growers Canada and Beer Canada. Both organizations called for an end to the blockades that hurt their business and that our government acted on dismantling.

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tourists from around the world are now making their travel plans for the fast-approaching summer tourism season, but the federal government's requirements for pre-departure testing at Canadian borders stand in the way of making Canada an attractive destination.

Yesterday, the Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable said the policy is not grounded in science or evidence. It also called on the government to drop it.

For the sake of the economic recovery in our hardest-hit tourism sector, can the federal Liberals tell travellers when they will drop the pre-departure travel requirements?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I am very grateful for the question, in particular because my region, my city and my riding of Quebec are of exceptional quality. Quebec has attracted thousands, if not millions, of foreigners and tourists over the years. We are very proud of that, and that is why we are so proud that the measures to which the member alludes have been reduced. They were relaxed just a day ago. We will continue to work to support the tourism industry while protecting the health and safety of travellers and workers.

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SENIORS

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the onset of this pandemic, our government acted swiftly by introducing emergency measures to keep Canadians financially afloat. While these benefits have been crucial for so many families, including those in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, I have personally heard from seniors that it has resulted in the reduction of the GIS payments they rely on to make ends meet.

Could the Minister of Seniors inform the House of what we are doing to strengthen income security for seniors who are dependent on the GIS?

Hon. Kamal Khara (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for her work and her advocacy for seniors in her community and in the House.

When it comes to supporting the most vulnerable, our government has always been there. That is especially true for low-income seniors. We have committed to supporting seniors who counted on pandemic supports and had their GIS impacted. We are making a major investment through an automatic one-time payment for those affected seniors. We unanimously passed Bill C-12 in the House, and I am confident that the other place will do the same.

Seniors know that our government will always be there for them.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than half of Canadians say they are struggling with the cost of living.

Yesterday, a report from the National Housing Council confirmed that the government is not making housing more affordable for Canadians. It also said that the Liberal government's national housing strategy is only meeting a fraction of the existing need. After six years of half measures, the housing affordability gap has only increased and Canadians are paying the price for the government's failures.

When will the Liberals stand up for Canadians by cracking down on housing speculators and make the needed investments to build 500,000 units of social and co-op housing?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we thank the housing council for its work, and we commit to closely examining the recommendations contained in the report that it prepared.

We are the government that reintroduced federal leadership in the housing sector. We have brought in significant resources through the national housing strategy, which has grown from \$40 billion to over \$72 billion. The hon. member mentioned the co-op sector. We are the government that saved the co-op sector, after it was abandoned by the Conservatives, to the tune of \$318 million, which would guarantee subsidies for a long time for the most vulnerable members of the community.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week a man froze to death in a downtown Winnipeg bus shelter in -30°C weather. We have a homelessness crisis in Winnipeg Centre that is costing precious lives.

People are forced to sleep out in the cold because the Liberals' national housing strategy fails to fix the housing crisis. People need real solutions. When will the Prime Minister respect the right to housing as a human right, and make adequate investments to ensure nobody else dies because they cannot find a home they can afford?

• (1510)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me make this absolutely clear. Even if one Canadian finds himself or herself on the street, it diminishes us as a society. I share the grief of the hon. member.

I want to reiterate our support for investments in affordable housing. I have lost count of the number of times I have been to Winnipeg, virtually and in person, to make announcements through the

Points of Order

rapid housing initiative, the national housing co-investment fund, the affordable housing innovation fund, the rental construction financing initiative, reaching home, the Canada-Manitoba housing benefit and the Canada-Manitoba bilateral agreement on housing.

We are doing everything that we can, and we will continue to do more.

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all the time we have for Oral Questions today.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is difficult to hear when there is so much noise in this place. You probably did not know how bad it was. I know we cannot rise in question period on a point of order, but I had to turn my volume up as high as I could to hear the hon. member for Repentigny due to the enormous roar of heckling against her as she spoke. That violates Standing Order 16 and Standing Order 18.

I know you are doing your very best to remind people to keep order, but it becomes hard when members cannot hear other members pose questions because of the rudeness and the noise.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her intervention. I want to remind all members that when someone else is speaking, as in right now, please respect each other and try to follow the rules of the House, because that is how good debate takes place.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Order. We are about to have someone rise on a point of order, so we want to hear what she is saying.

The hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, during question period, the member for Miramichi—Grand Lake claimed the Minister of Public Safety called the protesters “rapists”. I was present at the public safety committee meeting on Friday and can assure this House that the minister did not say that. I would like you to ask the member to apologize for misleading the House and to retract the statement.

Business of Supply

The Speaker: I will take that under advisement and return, but I want to remind hon. members to please check their facts before they say anything in the House and to try not to insult each other. Try to do it with words; we are debating issues, not calling each other names.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed and valued colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. I had four place names to remember, I who also have four names.

Elections Canada recently proposed a plan to redraw the federal electoral map—

The Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member for a second.

I want to remind everyone that there are members speaking in the House right now. I would ask those who want to have discussions to go into the hallways or whisper.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada recently proposed a plan to redraw the federal electoral map and give Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia four more seats while taking one seat away from Quebec. This electoral map reform will forever make us, the people of Quebec, a negligible quantity in the Canadian system.

While Quebec currently holds 78 out of 338 seats in the current House of Commons, if the proposed reform were to go ahead, Quebec would occupy 77 out of 342 seats in this hypothetical future federal Parliament. Since votes in Parliament are often close, as we have seen on several occasions during this Parliament, Quebec's political weight would be reduced, as it would account for 22% of the total number of members.

The trend will be clear. As Quebec's demographic significance decreases, its influence in the House will dwindle away to nothing.

Mathematics aside, continuously reducing Quebec's importance within the institution that makes the laws in this country will have real consequences. Quebec will have less and less say. Its interests and values will be more and more diluted, to the benefit of the interests and values of the rest of Canada. Is this not the real consequence of our presence within this system, which has a pattern of perpetually marginalizing us?

Prior to the poorly named Confederation, when French Canadians were more numerous than English Canadians, we enjoyed equal representation: Two peoples unequal in number but with the same

number of representatives, for as long as French Canadians were in the minority.

Then along came the 1867 regime. French Canadians were fewer in number, so parliamentary representation became proportional. It is handy when the conqueror decides what kind of system to set up.

In 1867, our ongoing marginalization was baked into the system. In 1867, the Province of Quebec held 36% of the seats in the House. Every time the electoral boundaries were redrawn thereafter, our weight diminished: 28% in 1947, 25% in 1999, 23% in 2015 and, soon, 22%.

As time goes by, Quebec will become more deeply submerged in the red tide. As time goes by, Quebec will command less and less fear and respect in Ottawa. As time goes by, we will have to waste energy trying to explain ourselves, make ourselves understood and gain respect. We will have to go to great lengths just to make ourselves a small part of this country's debates.

That is why the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill in this session of Parliament to create a “nation clause” that would guarantee that the number of members from Quebec would never be less than 25% of the total number of members in the House. That would be a strict minimum.

In 2006, the Canadian government tried to distract Quebec by labelling it as a “nation within a united Canada”. Is it not time to show that words have meaning and they are not just something to be used in the House? Will the House adopt our motion so that this is not just a tool to distract Quebecers? At least this motion will limit the damage.

Let us make one thing perfectly clear. Quebec has never wielded any power in Ottawa. It has not and never will. Canada is controlled by another nation. Even so-called French power is just smoke and mirrors. Even though some Canadian leaders have come from Quebec, their actions and decisions will always be subject to the law of the Canadian majority, and rightly so. The Quebec nation will always be at the mercy of the decisions the majority imposes on us.

The only parliament where the Quebec nation holds 100% of the seats is the Quebec National Assembly. We have lost count of how many unanimous motions of the Quebec National Assembly the House of Commons will not even deign to mention or discuss.

● (1515)

If “form a nation” means anything, the legislature solely dedicated to representing that nation should be able to say no to laws it does not want, such as the Emergencies Act, which Quebec unanimously rejected. That legislature should also be able to pass 100% of its laws without worrying they will be ripped apart by courts enforcing a constitutional order it never signed or consented to, as was the case with the Charter of the French Language, which is now a mere shadow of its former self.

A nation should also be able to stop worrying that its democratic choices, such as Bill 21, the secularism bill, will be subject to a challenge paid for by a state in which it is just a minority. It should be able to choose its own policies, policies that reflect its values and interests in terms of culture, justice, social solidarity, the environment, energy, international relations and trade agreements.

When Quebec's National Assembly votes unanimously in favour of increasing health transfers, it should not have to constantly beg a Parliament where Quebec will soon have just 22% of the seats to mercifully send us a portion of the taxes we pay.

Being a minority, and a shrinking one at that, in a foreign regime forces us to waste our potential and accept endless ridiculous compromises. Those compromises will end up compromising us as our weight shrinks. That is the fate that awaits us as part of Canada.

The regime is increasingly depriving us of our ability to decide for ourselves what we want for ourselves. This regime is beyond reform. Is it better to be 100% yourself or 22% of someone else? Is it better to be a majority or a minority? For me and my colleagues, to ask that question is to answer it.

We want Quebec to achieve independence because Canada is not our country. Its choices are its own, not ours. Independence is a question of democracy. There are certainly independent countries where the people are not free, but there is no such thing as a free people who do not have independence. It is as simple as that. The math is very straightforward.

A nation that is deprived of its political tools is a neutralized community that is condemned to powerlessness. That is the real problem with the electoral redistribution.

We must leave the Canadian state with no rancour because it is not our state. We are not at home in Canada and its institutions. We are tired of the Canadian state undermining our democratic choices in the name of a constitutional regime that has been imposed on us. We are tired of living with societal choices that are not our own, choices that are often even contrary to the ones we would make in the fullness of freedom.

Quebec's true history will only begin with the realization of our own country, one that is secular, just, humane, fundamentally free, where we will no longer need to ask for permission from anyone to make the choices that are most consistent with our values and our fundamental interests, in other words, the Republic of Quebec.

• (1520)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I am going to ask my question in English to make sure I get the words right.

[English]

I am sympathetic to the idea that we have to preserve, promote and continue to support particularly the French culture, the language and the dynamic in Quebec.

As I listen today, there has been a notion in this House that Quebec is the first province ever to lose a seat under redistribution. That is false. In Nova Scotia, we used to have 21 members of Parliament. We are now down to 11. Quebec, like other provinces, has

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the ability to protect its seats, in the sense that Quebec will never have fewer than 75 members of Parliament. I take notice that they want to fight to maintain the seat; I am okay with that.

In Nova Scotia, we have the largest Gaelic-speaking population outside of Scotland. We have a unique history. Will the member also fight for proportionality for Nova Scotia, so that Nova Scotia will always keep a certain percentage of seats in this House regardless of the dynamics of the population of the country?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I think that basically, every province can fight its own battles. I have no problem with that. If Nova Scotia and New Brunswick want to make an issue of this, that can be discussed, no problem, on condition that Quebec does not lose its democratic weight in the House. That is what needs to be taken into account: if the weight is increased for other provinces, then logically, it should be increased for Quebec as well.

Yes, there may be provinces that have lost some democratic weight in the past, but the fundamental issue is the claim that Quebec is a nation. This was recognized by the House. Will these words ever have any meaning? It is time to prove it.

• (1525)

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot talked about the Quebec nation and making sure that Quebec has enough representation in the House.

First, if Quebec wants to have another referendum, the National Assembly should go for another referendum. Based on the language he has been providing today, it seems that is what they want to do. I would encourage him to talk to his premier to do that.

Second, we do not talk enough about this in the House of Commons. British Columbia has six or seven seats. British Columbia has no guaranteed seats on the Supreme Court of Canada. The west still wants in, and I am sick and tired of hearing all the time about the needs of Quebec when British Columbia needs its fair share of the federation as well. We pay taxes and the Constitution is representation by population. Quebec needs to recognize that B.C. pays its fair share and B.C. deserves just as much representation.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague criticize me for promoting the fundamental objective of the Bloc Québécois, which is Quebec's independence.

I also heard him fiercely standing up for his fellow citizens. That is what we are doing. He was elected to represent his fellow citizens, just like my colleagues and I were elected to represent ours. We were elected as separatists, knowing that this is not a place where we will be influencing a separatist movement.

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I want to reassure my colleague that we also want to invite the Quebec National Assembly to launch a separation bid. We are the first to be in favour of it. I ask my colleague to recognize that we were elected as separatists and that it is natural for us to use our platform and our access to federal debates to promote our cause among our fellow citizens. What is wrong with that?

We were elected without hiding our objective from anyone. It is clear. I do not want anyone to criticize us for bringing it forward. If my colleague is sick and tired of always hearing about the needs of Quebec, I hope he will join us in advocating for our independence.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot that my youngest daughter was born in Montreal.

[*English*]

I thank him for speaking about representation for Canadians and for those in Quebec, and I want to ask him if the Bloc agrees that the first-past-the-post system is no longer serving all people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: During its first term in office, the current government promised to reform the electoral system in order to make it more proportional, but that promise was quickly broken.

Of course we were in favour of electoral reform, and I have no reason to believe that we would not support it in the future, but on one condition, of course. We will not automatically give our approval because not all electoral reform will necessarily be good. We will not say yes or no to the broad concept of electoral reform. We will examine all the details as soon as a proposal is put forward. For now, it does not seem as though electoral reform is even on the table.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you about Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, which was previously the riding of Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. I will come back to that a little later.

I am very pleased to be speaking about this matter today. I was listening to the speeches by my leader and my House leader this morning, and it was music to my ears to hear them stand up for Quebec. I feel sorry for our poor Conservative colleagues who are again going to listen to us defending Quebec and the nation that it is, because that is essentially the topic of the day.

As my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot was saying, since 2006, we have been reminding the House that Quebecers form a nation. The House reiterated it last June, when it acknowledged that Quebec forms a nation, and that French is its only official and common language. I believe that when acknowledging this unity and this desire to live together also means acknowledging that we aspire and have the right to a certain form of self-determination and control over our social, economic and cultural development.

As long as Quebec is part of Canada, our nationhood has real political implications. In order for consideration of our nationhood to be embedded in the political decisions made in the House of Com-

mons, it is absolutely essential that we have the political weight to express it.

I am particularly interested in today's topic because my riding was targeted during the last electoral redistribution 10 years ago. As in 2012, the Chief Electoral Officer, or CEO, proposed a new redistribution of seats last October. This redistribution would add four seats in total but would take one seat away from Quebec, dropping our seat allocation from 78 to 77. This would be the first time since 1970 that a province would lose a seat in the House of Commons. I think that is totally unacceptable.

The only way to avoid this would be to change the formula for calculating the number of MPs and their distribution per province, in order to protect Quebec. Earlier, the member for Drummond introduced a bill in the House to guarantee that the number of members from Quebec cannot be less than 25% of the total number of members. I am sure that he explained the ins and outs of the nation clause that we want to integrate.

The principle we are asking the House to adopt today is simple. We want to protect Quebec's political weight. I have a hard time understanding how anyone could be against this. I said that it was important for me to speak. It is not just Quebec's voice that is being weakened, but the voice of eastern Quebec as well.

I want to look back at 2012, when the last boundary changes were made. Members for the region stood together to speak out against the elimination of a riding in our area of the country because that is what was proposed: to eliminate the riding that I represent today. The reasons were essentially based on demographics, since the population of the riding was less than the new quotient of about 101,000 residents that was established at the time.

The Chief Electoral Officer tried to balance the population counts of the eastern Quebec ridings with the Quebec average by eliminating that riding. The federal electoral boundaries commission for Quebec proposed expanding the boundaries of the already extremely large riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques and those of the riding of Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine to make two huge ridings and thus eliminate the riding of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

That would have created two geographically huge ridings, which would become two of the most heavily populated ridings in Quebec. The MPs at the time—Guy Caron, the NDP member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, François Lapointe, the NDP member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, and Jean-François Fortin, the Bloc Québécois MP for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, a predecessor to whom I send my regards, presented a brief to the commission to show how terrible of an idea it was to do away with a rural riding.

I got that brief off the shelf and dusted it off because it contains some arguments that are still valid today and that, unfortunately, prove that there is a chance we might end up in the same situation we were in 10 years ago. Eastern Quebec may be targeted and lose its political weight in the House of Commons.

• (1530)

I want to review what happened. Fortunately, in 2012, my riding did not disappear. If it had, I would not be here, obviously. They just redrew the riding boundaries. We ended up losing Haute-Gaspésie and gaining part of Chaleur Bay, which is way over on the other side of the peninsula. That led to pointless confusion with people trying to figure out who their MP was every few years. Calling on one's federal MP is not an everyday occurrence. The outcome was a victory for MPs in the region who fought to retain their voters.

I would like to go over the reasons why I think rural ridings should not be changed. For one, the territory is huge. My riding alone is almost 15,000 square kilometres. It covers two administrative regions, four regional county municipalities, 56 municipalities and two indigenous communities. It is big, and that makes for challenges that are entirely unlike those associated with urban ridings even though our ridings are a little less populous.

In rural areas, MPs must deal with multiple interests and build a consensus to ensure a certain cohesion of regional points of view. In a riding like mine, when a debate involves the interests of the region, I have to consult my 56 mayors, my four reeves, my two indigenous leaders, the four chambers of commerce and all the agricultural and economic unions, and everything else that is part of it. Everyone deserves to be heard, but covering such a large area comes with certain challenges.

It is a whole different ball game in an urban riding, where some of my colleagues are dealing with a single mayor or a single provincial member. It is not at all the same.

I think that we must be respectful of natural communities, the boundaries of administrative regions and RCMs. We must not split them up. That is just what the 2021 redistribution proposed: splitting up the RCMs. I think we have to be aware of the realities that come with living in a certain political region, whether at the municipal, provincial or federal level. People in a given municipality or other local district are going to form economic, social and political ties just by virtue of sharing the same political community.

People often try to justify these redistributions based on demographic forecasts that show a new urban design based densification rather than sprawl. I understand that, but I think it is a bit excessive to base the redistribution on 20-year forecasts, when the boundary review exercise has to be done every 10 years anyway.

In addition, the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé regions saw positive net migration in 2021 for the first time in 20 years. I think that also needs to be taken into consideration. It is not the same phenomenon as before. Perhaps this can be viewed as a positive effect of the pandemic, which has allowed people to move to the regions thanks to teleworking, so that also needs to be taken into consideration.

I would also like to mention the importance of constituency offices in a region like mine. I may be one of the few federal MPs who have four constituency offices. The reason is simple. My riding is so huge that it would make no sense for someone from Carleton-sur-Mer to drive two hours to be able to get service at the Amqui office, or for the people of Mont-Joli to drive for an hour to

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get to the Matane office. That would be ridiculous. It is important to me to be able to deliver services to them.

Riding offices lend a human face to politics and bring people closer to elected officials. In a way, it is the front line, the first point of contact where we attempt to remedy the failures of the big federal machine. The number of immigration and employment insurance cases dealt with every week by riding offices proves that we need to provide this service to the public.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the work of my very dear colleagues at my riding office: Ariane, Marjolaine and Ghislain. Without them, I would definitely not be able to do this job, and the problems of many people in my riding would not be solved.

I am going to go straight to my closing remarks as I see that my time is running out.

The 2012 brief concluded as follows: Rural living is not a recognized constitutional right. It is a way of life, an economy, a set of values and interests which, in and of themselves, have a constitutional right to expression through the right to vote equity.

With these words, I will implore my colleagues from all parties to accept the idea that, for all the reasons I have just given, Quebec's voice, and especially the voice of eastern Quebec, must not be weakened.

• (1535)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

This is a very important topic. I will ask my question in English to ensure I choose the right words.

[*English*]

I am not against the principle of trying to protect francophone culture and language. The fact that I have tried to use the French language is indicative of that. However, what I take issue with regarding the Bloc Québécois, recognizing that they are sovereigntists in the House and do not necessarily want to sit here in Ottawa, is the idea that Quebec does not have influence within the federation. Whether we look at the cabinet of the government on this side or we look at future leaders who try to become Prime Minister in this country, members have to have a propensity in French and they have to have an ability to resonate in Quebec.

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The member talked about rural members. I am not against adding and keeping 78 seats, by the way, in Quebec, notwithstanding that there has been a loss of seats in other provinces. However, by pushing for proportionality, she is making the argument that rurality does not matter outside of Quebec, that MPs like me would have to have larger ridings and that my representation would not be the same because she believes that Quebec should be absolutely proportionate and the same proportionality cannot exist elsewhere.

Can she provide some remarks on that for me?

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

From what I understand, he is voting in favour of our motion, since he agrees with it. I invite him to do so.

I keep hearing the same comment today. People are saying that they do not want to hear about Quebec anymore and that Quebecers are being annoying with this motion. They are wondering why we would not defend the political weight of other provinces too. I look forward to hearing them move a motion in the House to protect the political weight of other provinces; why not?

At this point, according to the new proposed redistribution, Quebec would lose a seat, and we have no choice but to stand up for Quebec and its political weight. I talked about Quebec, but I also talked about eastern Quebec, which could very well be targeted as another part of Quebec.

My colleague works within the government so I invite his government to discuss the possibility of protecting provinces such as Nova Scotia; why not? Earlier my colleague was talking about British Columbia. We look forward to hearing them, but for us there is no question that we will always stand up for Quebec.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague for her speech.

She did a wonderful job explaining how important it is to provide decent service to rural populations. There are other realities, such as regional realities. Perhaps my colleague could expand on that.

For example, there are also territories. Everyone gripes about how Quebec always wants everything. The territories each have their own member of Parliament, even though mathematically, their population does not warrant a seat. It is important for the territories to be represented to reflect regional realities. What does my colleague think about that?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He is absolutely right. I do not think that demographics should be the only factor determining the distribution of seats in the House of Commons. I think that cultural, historic and regional contexts need to be taken into account, as my colleague pointed out.

My region has been designated as a resource region by the Government of Quebec. There are three types of regions: manufacturing regions, resource regions and urban regions. Back home, we extract

natural resources and often export them outside Quebec. Our economy is perhaps below the Quebec average.

Our voice is important and deserves to be heard in the House of Commons. We must share our concerns to ensure that we get what we are owed. The context and uniqueness of the regions must be taken into account in these kinds of calculations. I would also like to remind members that our net migration was positive. This is a good thing, and it must be taken into account by the Chief Electoral Officer during the redistribution study.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my friend and colleague from Alfred-Pellan, who is also a member of our Quebec caucus's leadership team.

I am very happy to have the chance to speak to an issue as important as redrawing Canada's federal electoral map. This is an important topic, one that lies at the heart of our democratic life from coast to coast to coast.

In Canada, our democratic institutions and our Constitution, first and foremost, provide powerful mechanisms to ensure that Canadians feel adequately represented within Canada's Parliament.

The official process for redrawing the electoral map is an extremely important one. The law states that it must be done every 10 years, and that is why we are debating this issue today. Before we get any further into the debate, I think it is worth reminding the House and all Canadians about various parts of that process.

First of all, the process is the outcome of more than 60 years of independent, non-partisan commissions. I think all Canadians can be proud of the fact that Canada has this process.

The act defines the roles, responsibilities and criteria that these commissions must meet when redrawing federal electoral boundaries.

Prior to 1964, the House of Commons itself was responsible for setting electoral boundaries, through a committee appointed specifically for this purpose. However, Parliament realized that gerrymandering—a term used to describe the manipulation of electoral boundaries—was still a significant risk to the integrity of our system. This was and is unacceptable.

The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act was a key measure introduced to address this very problem. The government's role in the whole process is extremely limited.

It is important to note, once again, that the government has no decision-making role or influence over the proposal we received from the independent commissions. The operative word here is “proposal”. It is simply a proposal.

The commissions will continue to work independently in proposing new federal electoral boundaries. I want to reassure all the elected members of the House that our government has heard the concerns of Quebecers regarding the Elections Canada proposal.

Now that this background is clear, let us return to the motion before us today.

Today's motion has to do with Quebec, in particular, and how many seats it has in Parliament. I want to be very clear. As a member from Quebec, as a proud Quebecer and a proud Canadian, I believe it is absolutely essential that Quebec continue to have strong representation in the House and in all of our federal institutions. It is part of our Canadian identity. I agree with my colleagues. We need to work together to make sure that Quebec does not lose a seat.

If there is a government that recognizes the importance of Quebec and the Quebec nation in our federation, it is no doubt our Liberal government. During the past three elections, the Liberal Party has represented Quebecers the best, going by the number of seats it holds in the House, the number of votes it received and, most importantly, its actions.

The list of what the Liberal government has done for Quebec is long. We have invested \$1.8 billion in housing in Quebec, \$6 billion in child care for Quebec, \$600 million in Quebec's aerospace industry, and so on.

Over the past two years, the action we have taken in Quebec during the pandemic has been important and even vital for our seniors, families, businesses and regions. I am very proud of that.

Since 2015, the government has not just stood up for the interests of Quebec.

● (1545)

Since 2015, the government has made decisions, passed legislation and provided funding. The Liberal Party has taken meaningful action to the benefit of all Quebecers.

We can count on the parliamentary group that works the hardest to best represent Quebecers to do even more.

We are the only party that wants to act and that can act for all the regions of Quebec, and that is what we will keep doing. The same goes for this file. We will do this work properly, by analyzing all the factors that have to be taken into consideration. We will not improvise a response on the back of a napkin.

The government will do its job and propose an initiative that takes into account its democratic principles. Let me be clear to our Quebec constituents that they can count on the government to ensure that Quebec and Quebecers are properly represented in Parliament.

Speaking of representation, I want to acknowledge the strong voice of our Quebec Liberal caucus and our 35 elected members for

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defending the interests of Quebec within the Canadian government. I am obviously thinking above all about the Prime Minister, the member for Papineau and proud Quebecer.

I am thinking about our wonderful Quebec lieutenant, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and member for Honoré-Mercier. We can always count on him to promote the interests of Quebec at the highest decision-making levels.

I am thinking about our Minister of Health and member for Québec, who is responsible for our policies to fight the pandemic. I am thinking about our Minister of Foreign Affairs, the member for Ahuntsic-Cartierville, who is currently at the UN representing Canada and doing remarkable work on our response to the war by Russia against Ukraine. I am thinking about our Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, who is ensuring that we invest in our future, whether with the Lion Electric buses or Medicago vaccines. I am thinking about our Minister of Environment and the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, my riding's neighbour. I see the incredible efforts he is making to ensure that we respond to this issue that is a priority for Quebecers and that we leave a healthy planet for our children.

I am thinking about our ministers of Justice, Agriculture, Sports, and Crown-Indigenous Relations. I would like to mention all our ministers and Quebec MPs, but that would take me well beyond my time.

I will conclude that defending the place of Quebec, of our Quebec nation, within a united Canada and ensuring that Quebec's voice is heard at the highest levels of our government and our institutions is a priority for me and for our government.

We will stand up for Quebec, as we have from the beginning.

● (1550)

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have just heard a tribute to the Liberal Party. It is practically a complete list of Quebec's Liberal ministers.

Throughout her speech, my colleague stated that it is not a political decision. She ended by naming every Liberal MP in Quebec.

I would like to know if that is political, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, Elections Canada's proposal has nothing to do with partisanship or politics. What the Bloc Québécois is doing today, however, is certainly political.

I remind members once again that we are here in the House to represent all Canadians, including Quebecers. That is what I do, and that is what the 35 government members who represent Quebec do every day.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this debate today is difficult for me because I have a problem with the idea that we continually revisit our boundaries. I certainly support representation by population, but my riding has been changed over the years, and we keep adding more and more MPs to this place.

At some point, we have to consider whether we can keep the number of MPs capped at some level. I do not want what the U.K. Parliament looks like. The Parliament of Westminster has over 650 people who can never be in the chamber at the same time. I am just wondering if we can re-examine the process. It is the law and it is the way the Elections Act works, but can we re-examine this?

The Bloc Québécois raises a good point: It is going to lose the representation for Quebec as a nation in Canada. However, so too does the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon have a good point. What about British Columbia? We need to get a handle on representation by population, perhaps through fair voting and getting rid of first past the post.

[Translation]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, my colleague raised some very important and complex points in her question. I would have to say that it is obviously our democracy that is at stake. I think this is something we will have to debate in the House and we will have to hear from members across all parties to find a more comprehensive solution than the one proposed in the motion before us, moved by the Bloc Québécois.

• (1555)

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate what was mentioned by the Bloc, and that is that this is Elections Canada and a non-partisan issue. Regardless of who is representing those ridings now, we are talking about whether it makes sense for the boundary to change and additional ridings to be introduced or taken away. In my opinion, we are talking now about representation of all people, not which party represents someone. I am concerned that might be influencing the decision on the other side of the aisle.

Almost three-quarters of Canadians believe that first past the post is no longer serving them. Does the Liberal member agree that we need to start looking at the proportional representation model?

[Translation]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I am very open to the idea of discussing the way Canada's democracy works, but I think that all systems around the world have problems. It will ultimately be up to members of Parliament and Canadians to decide how they want to proceed with our democracy.

I think the situation in Ukraine and Russia has us thinking about the importance of democracy here, in Canada, and around the world.

[English]

PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE EMERGENCIES ACT

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I give notice that, with respect to consideration of Government Business No. 9, at the next sitting of the House a minister of the Crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that the debate be not further adjourned.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a member from Quebec, it is my duty to participate in today's discussion on my Bloc Québécois colleague's motion. I want to tell him that the current formula has a very interesting history and is the result of many amendments and historical considerations in which Quebec plays an important role. As my mother always said, you must know where you are coming from to know where you are going. That lesson stayed with me, and I want to begin with a review of the fascinating history that led to the current formula.

Early on, in 1867, the British North American Act, which was renamed the Constitution Act, 1867, divided the 181 seats of the House of Commons between its four founding provinces. At that time, Ontario had 82 seats, Quebec had 65, Nova Scotia had 19 and New Brunswick had 15. In order to ensure that each province's representation in the House of Commons continued to reflect its population, the act stated that the number of seats allocated to each province would be recalculated after each decennial census, starting with the 1871 census. The total number of seats was to be calculated by dividing the population of each province by a fixed number, referred to as the “electoral quotient”. This quotient was to be obtained by dividing the population of Quebec by 65, the number of seats in the House of Commons that Quebec was guaranteed by the Constitution. The formula was to be applied with only one exception and that was the “one-twentieth rule”, under which “no province could lose seats in a redistribution unless its share of the national population had decreased by at least five percent...between the last two censuses.”

It was not until more than 40 years later that the formula was changed for the first time. In 1915, the first change was made by the adoption of the senatorial clause. Still in effect today, this clause states that “a province cannot have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it does in the Senate”. In 1915, it had the immediate effect of guaranteeing four seats to the province of Prince Edward Island, which still has four seats today. Thirty years later, in 1946, a second change was made to the formula. The new rules divided 255 seats among the provinces and territories based on their share of Canada's total population rather than on the average population per electoral district in Quebec.

Canada is a diversified country, and, since the population of all provinces had not increased at the same rate, certain provinces have lost seats. Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan all lost seats after the 1951 census. A third change was made: the “15% clause” was adopted to prevent a too-rapid loss of seats in some provinces. Under this rule, no province could lose more than 15% of the number of seats to which it had been entitled at the last readjustment. The same three provinces, plus Quebec, however, all lost seats after the 1961 census. These same four provinces, plus Newfoundland, would also have lost seats after the 1971 census, so legislation was introduced to resolve this situation in 1974.

The fourth change was actually a new formula. Concern over the continuing loss of seats by some provinces prompted Parliament to adopt the Representation Act, which, among other things, guaranteed that no province could lose seats. As in the pre-1946 rules, Quebec was used as the basis for calculations, but there were three differences.

• (1600)

First, Quebec would henceforth be entitled to 75 seats instead of 65. Second, the number of seats assigned to Quebec was to grow by four at each subsequent readjustment in such a manner as to slow down the growth in the average population of an electoral district. Third, three categories of provinces were created: large provinces, those having a population of more than 2.5 million; intermediate provinces, those with populations between 1.5 million and 2.5 million; and small provinces, with populations under 1.5 million.

Only the large provinces were to be allocated seats in strict proportion to Quebec; separate and more favourable rules were to apply to the small and intermediate provinces.

The amalgam formula was applied only once, leading to the establishment of 282 seats in the House in 1976. Following the 1981 Census, calculations revealed that the amalgam formula would result in a substantial increase in the number of seats in the House of Commons both immediately and after subsequent censuses. For example, with the traditions of that time, the formula would have increased the size of the House to 369 seats after 2001.

In passing the Representation Act, 1985, on electoral representation, Parliament changed the formula again and also brought into effect a new grandfather clause. This new clause, which is still in effect, guarantees each province no fewer seats than it had in 1976 or during the 33rd Parliament, in 1985. This clause was not the only change, however. The revised formula for calculating seats involved several steps. Starting with the 282 seats in the House of Commons in 1985, one seat was allocated to the Northwest Territo-

ries, one to the Yukon and one to Nunavut, leaving 279 seats. The total population of the 10 provinces was divided by 279 to obtain the electoral quotient.

The initial number of seats for each province was calculated by dividing the total population of each province by the quotient. If the result left a remainder higher than 0.50, the number of seats was rounded up to the next whole number. Then, the senatorial clause and grandfather clause were applied to obtain the final seat numbers.

As we all know, more recently, in 2011, the Conservative government changed the formula once again. The 2011 change was made to tackle the significant under-representation of fast-growing provinces, namely Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, which the 1985 formula could not address. The change also aimed to ensure that overrepresented provinces would not become under-represented after applying the new formula. The representation rule was introduced and gave additional seats to Quebec, which would have otherwise become under-represented. The number of seats for slower-growing provinces was maintained. Ontario was allotted 15 additional seats, British Columbia and Alberta each gained six seats, and Quebec received 3 more seats.

Since 2021 was a decennial year, following the Chief Electoral Officer's seat calculations, the House of Commons will continue to evolve. My colleagues will be looking forward to the results of the independent boundaries redistribution process that is currently under way.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will take advantage of the fact the member, my colleague and friend, is a Quebec member of Parliament. Yesterday, we had a wonderful debate with respect to the modernization of the Broadcasting Act. I think Bill C-11 is a wonderful piece of legislation that is going to help us see growth in the arts industry, which I know is a very important industry for my colleague.

I wonder if he could provide his thoughts as to why it is important that the national government continue to support our arts community. That is something the bill will do by modernizing the Broadcasting Act.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, I am the son of immigrants, and I am very proud to have been born in Quebec. I understand the notion of culture very well. I live out my Italian and Quebec cultures at home for my son Gabriel. I must say that this is the most beautiful thing I have done, because culture is an asset that determines where we want to go. As I was saying earlier, my mother used to tell me that you have to know where you come from to know where you want to go.

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Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to look back in time, to 1995. At the time, Jean Chrétien was Prime Minister and the House had recognized Quebec as a distinct society. Mr. Chrétien asked in the House for the government to take that into account in all of its decisions.

Since the House reiterated last June that Quebec is a nation, would it not be time, in light of today's debate, to take Quebec's nationhood into account in the decisions that we must take?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, although any scenario that would cause Quebec to lose a seat is unfair in my eyes, the Bloc Québécois's proposed fix goes too far in denying equity and will only trigger an endless constitutional debate that will ultimately benefit no one.

The government is advocating for a sound, fair approach. We have heard Quebecers' concerns on this subject clearly. We will work with all parliamentarians to ensure that Canadians across the country, including Quebecers, and I am proud to call myself a Quebecer, will continue to enjoy strong representation in the House.

• (1610)

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for rightly pointing out our agreement to protect Quebec in many ways and make sure it does not lose any seats. New Democrats stand firm in our support for this work.

While we are at it, I have one question for the member related to the topic of electoral reform. In 2015, the Prime Minister promised to end the first-past-the-post electoral system so the voices of citizens could be better represented. Does the government agree that a proportional electoral system could reduce cynicism, especially now, and encourage greater political participation?

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, Quebec's place in the House is and must remain strong and stable, like its place in our Confederation.

I also have to say that electoral reform would most certainly have an impact on the representation of the parties and the regional distribution across Canada. However, it will not change anything about the basic issue of Quebec's representation. Even with a new voting system, we would still have to decide how the seats would be distributed among the provinces.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, in light of my colleague from Edmonton Griesbach's question, I think we need to look at the reason why we have division in our country.

We, in the Green Party, think that the biggest problem is our voting system, which promotes a more toxic system and a non-collaborative approach and atmosphere among the parties. A proportional voting system would be more collaborative and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. member to give the member from Alfred-Pellan the chance to respond.

The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan for a brief response.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

There is no question that our government supports Quebec's important place in our Confederation and in the House of Commons.

However, we do not need extreme measures to do that. I want to come back to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry to interrupt the member, but we must stop there.

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, before I get started, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île. Clearly I am a generous man, because 10 minutes is not a lot of time.

I am pleased to address the House today in support of the Bloc Québécois motion.

The Bloc's motion states one very simple principle: when the electoral map is redrawn, Quebec's political weight must not be reduced.

My colleagues opposite told us we had nothing to worry about because the number of MPs from Quebec would stay the same. However, if more seats are added elsewhere, the effect will be the same. This is about a percentage of voices, which has been in freefall since the dawn of the Canadian federation.

Some members of the House do not understand our approach or what we want. I heard some exasperation earlier. One person said they were sick of listening to Quebec's demands.

What is strange is that, last week or the week before—not long ago, anyway—the House voted unanimously in favour of a motion to amend a constitutional provision for Saskatchewan. I pointed this out to members several times throughout the day, saying that I did not understand why they did not care about Quebec's status as much. If any of them are wondering why Quebec makes so many demands, the answer is because there is no recognition in this federation.

When it comes to the federation, most MPs from other parties are hoping to convince us it will one day be ours too. Have they ever asked themselves why we do not feel at home in this federation? It is because there is no recognition, and that brings me to the ultimate goal, which has been there since the beginning.

I would have liked to give a history lesson, but I see that in two minutes I have talked about a lot of things that are not in my notes, so I will refrain.

The ultimate goal has existed since the conquest. Some will argue that I am going way back in time, but Quebecers are a resilient, fighting people who have been struggling against assimilation since that time. Many circumstances throughout history could have led to their disappearance, but they resist. Why do they do it? It is because they are prepared to stand in a parliamentary chamber, speak for their nation and explain to their colleagues, in a friendly manner and will all due respect, that they will at least try to recognize the relative weight of the founding nation.

I am not going to tell an obscure story, and this will take me directly to the year 1867, which is of course the year of Canadian Confederation. I would remind members that the previous Constitution was from 1840, that is, the Act of Union, which followed the Patriotes' rebellion and the Durham Report. The specific objective was to eliminate the French fact in Quebec. That was clear.

In 1867, Canada was formed and there were four provinces. At the time, we represented 36% of the population, and I believe that our ancestors were sucked into the illusion of two founding peoples. If we look at who still talks about two founding peoples in this country today, we will find the 35 Liberals from Quebec, but apart from them, there are not a lot of people talking about it. There is more talk about multiculturalism and the fact that there are other minorities.

Coming back to the problem, I will take the example of unanimous motions from the National Assembly of Quebec. How many times have its unanimous motions not been respected by this Parliament? To those who will respond by saying that the Quebec nation has its government in Quebec City, I would retort that I hope that it will be fully governed out of Quebec City one day. Naturally, I think it will, as do my Bloc colleagues.

For now, unfortunately, Quebec's parliament is under the dominion of another Parliament, the one we are in today. If there is no decent representation of Quebec, the voice will not carry. I would go even further: If there is no decent political party whose mission is to stand up for the interests of Quebec, then the voice will not be very loud.

Members only need to consider the number of debates on either language or culture that took place between 2011 and 2019. I would like those who enjoy mathematics to do the math just for the fun of it. I am not referring to the number of debates on Quebec culture, our language, our place, and respect for our laws from 2019 to 2022. Some will take up the challenge.

• (1615)

I am getting off topic. To those who wonder why we are here to debate language, I would say the following. In 1871, a law prohibited French-language instruction in New Brunswick. In 1877, the same thing happened on Prince Edward Island. In 1890, Manitoba eliminated French schools. I remind members that Manitoba was originally created as a province for French-speaking Métis people. In 1892 and 1901, laws were enacted in the Northwest Territories to block French education. In 1905, Alberta and Saskatchewan were created as English-speaking provinces, despite having originally been developed and explored by francophones. In 1912, Ontario issued Regulation 17, which was in effect until 1944 and caused untold damage to the Franco-Ontarian community. In 1916, it was

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Manitoba's turn, and in 1932, it was Saskatchewan's. In 2018, Ontario legislation thwarted the creation of a French-language university in Ontario.

All of this to say that the French fact and the Quebec nation must be represented, and this representation must be significant. Our voice needs to have an impact. We are already in the minority. There is no need to worry; we are not looking to take over the federal Parliament. We want to ensure that our voice will continue to be heard. I have a question for those who say that we complain all the time and are always asking for something.

What have they done since 1995? What have they done after all of those emotional speeches, all those promises? Absolutely nothing has been done. Quebec has had no recognition.

My colleagues can shake their heads, but we did not sign in 1982. That is what is happening. Now we are called whiners when we ask for something. Whether members like it or not, I should point out that 25% of the seats in Parliament for the founding people is a bare minimum. I mentioned 1995, but I could go back to the previous referendum in 1992, on the Charlottetown accord. Quebec refused to sign the accord because it did not think the conditions were enough, since there were other clauses. English Canada also refused to sign because they thought the accord gave too much. That right there is Canada in a nutshell.

Being a nation means having the right to develop ourselves. As long as the Quebec Parliament is subject to the good will of the Canadian Parliament, it is vital that Quebec maintain a minimum weight in the House. We are here to maintain that. My colleagues will not be surprised to hear me say that I sincerely hope that Quebec will once again take matters into its own hands and ask itself the question again, and obviously I hope that the answer will be yes. When we do not control all of the political decisions and taxes, we cannot control the destiny of our nation. That is the issue.

I look forward to my colleagues' questions. I hope they will not be aggressive, but I am prepared to deal with the substance of the issues, to get to the bottom of things, and I would like my colleagues to understand that this motion is not against anyone. We are working for our people. We are working for the survival of our language and culture.

I made a list earlier of the laws that show that things do not work like that outside Quebec. For these last 10 seconds, I would invite my colleagues to really think about this and not simply vote against the motion because they do not want to give Quebec anything, as usual. Let us remember what we did for Saskatchewan a few weeks ago.

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• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I must admit the Bloc members are being somewhat transparent about wanting to see Quebec separate from Canada. I am not really hearing as much justification in their arguments as I would like to have heard, but one of the biggest problems I have is that I believe they have an alternative motive, and they are very clear on that.

We get the same sorts of presentations from other jurisdictions on other concerns that they have. This one happens to be inside the House. Why should we give the Bloc any credibility on the issue? The simple reason is that it is politically motivated. It is in order to ultimately see Quebec become a separate nation. That is the motivation for the Bloc.

Personally, I believe we live in the best country in the world, and Quebec is a part—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Yves Perron: Quebec is a part of that.

[Translation]

However, Quebec must not talk too loud or ask for anything. That is the problem.

I am being asked to give substantive arguments. In fact, the Bloc Québécois is here to salvage something from the wreckage in the meantime.

It would be nice if the member would listen to the answer to his question. That is the least he can do. Well, in that case, I hope the parliamentary secretary has a good day.

From what I understood from the question, the member wants me to provide arguments as to why Quebec should be independent. I have plenty of arguments, but I would need at least a half an hour, Madam Speaker—

• (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I cannot give the hon. member half an hour.

I would also remind him that we do not mention attendance or absence in the House. We must avoid doing that.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I agree with the motion.

In 2015, the Prime Minister promised an end to the current electoral system so that citizens' voices would be better represented. Here we are. Does the member not agree that a proportional electoral system might encourage greater political participation?

I thank him in advance for listening to me speak in French.

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for asking her question in such good French. We appreciate it. It was great.

It is high time that the voting system were reviewed, in all parliaments for that matter, in order to better consider proportional representation. However, in any reform of the voting system, regional differences must also be taken into account.

In a previous question, I mentioned the specificity of the three Canadian territories. They each have their own member, because these regions must be properly represented. However, the population, in mathematical terms, does not justify the member. We do not dispute that. We think it is fine.

We want to apply a similar principle to Quebec, because we are francophones, we do not have the same culture, and we often do not have the same values. Sometimes we have the same values, and that is good. However, there are times when we do not share the same interests. That is all.

[English]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the way I see it, there are a couple of different ways we could come at this issue. The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has suggested that we actually cap the number of members of Parliament.

The Quebec representation right now makes up about 23% of the seats in this House. Quebec does have a constitutional protection of 75 seats, so there will never be fewer than 75 seats for Quebec in the House of Commons. Would the member support the proposition of capping the number of seats in this place, recognizing that Quebec's portion would never go under 75 seats, and therefore Quebec would always maintain somewhere between 20% and 23% of the composition of the House?

When I look around from the perspective of a Nova Scotia MP, there is a lot of influence from Quebec, and I support that, and it is important, but would the member support the idea of capping it and then protecting, on the constitutional basis—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

That depends on the way the question is asked. If the idea is that we will keep having 75 MPs, but they will represent 25% of the federal Parliament, I will answer yes.

Today, we are not necessarily talking about a specific number of MPs. We are talking about relative weight. I have a lot of respect for the people of Nova Scotia, just as I have a tremendous amount of respect for the people of Prince Edward Island and so on. I mean no disrespect, but there is a fundamental difference that people need to understand. They must consider the nationhood aspect.

Here in Parliament today, there is the Canadian nation and the Quebec nation. It is not the same nation. These are two nations that are inherently friends, that have a lot of affection for one another and that can work together. That is the reality.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, under the new proposed redistribution, the House would have 342 members, with four new seats, of which 77 would go to Quebec, who would lose one seat. This would cause Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons to go from 23.1% to 22.5%. It is not the Chief Electoral Officer's fault. He is mechanically applying the formula set out in section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867. However, the number of seats is Parliament's decision, hence our motion today.

This would be the first time since 1966 that a province loses seats in the House of Commons, but Quebec's weight has been going down non-stop since the coming into force in 1867 of the British North America Act, which became the Constitution Act. At the time, Quebec had 65 out of the 181 seats, which gave it a political weight of 36%. Today, since 2015, the Quebec nation has had 78 seats out of 338, for a political weight of 23.1%. Now it would drop to 22.5%, which is unacceptable.

This is actually just the next chapter of the story that started with the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The purpose of the Quebec Act of 1774 was to prevent French Canadians from joining the American Revolution. The Constitutional Act of 1791 established a territory in which English Loyalists were the majority. Over time, immigration made Canada's anglophone population the majority. Things culminated with the British North America Act of 1867.

Throughout Canada's history, British and Canadian governments have openly resorted to military suppression, anglophone immigration, the prohibition of French schools and all kinds of other measures to assimilate francophones and make us the minority.

The people originally known as French Canadians dropped from 99% of the population in 1763 to 87% in 1791 and 29% in 1871. The percentage has been in steady decline ever since. As my colleague said, the Constitution Act, 1867, was followed by statutes abolishing French schools in all of the Canadian provinces that now have an anglophone majority.

From the start, the Constitution Act, 1867, protected bilingualism in Quebec. The federal government ignored that for a very long time. We are still feeling the effects now with the Official Languages Act.

At the end of that period, in the 1960s, the Laurendeau-Dunton Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established. André Laurendeau sought to give collective rights to the Quebec nation, but that did not happen. The commission's work led to a multiculturalism act, which somewhat weakened the Quebec identity, as it was seen as one cultural community among many.

The commission also resulted in a bilingualism act, which was supposed to protect official language minorities. In Quebec, the anglophone community just happened to be considered the minority, which until then had benefited from colonial privileges and had a very dominant position in Quebec society. Thus, instead of taking action to defend French everywhere, the Canadian government took action in Quebec, the only francophone state, and found nothing better to do than to strengthen English.

Today, we are seeing the decline of French, which the Official Languages Act will not reverse. It is nonetheless surprising to note

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that French has declined with every census and that since the Official Languages Act was passed, the rate of francophone assimilation has increased across the country.

The Government of Canada admitted just two years ago that French is on the decline and that it has a responsibility to defend and protect French everywhere, even in Quebec. That is not what we see in the Official Languages Act. Certain principles have been laid down, but the same old approach is being used.

• (1630)

I think Quebec is caught in a trap. If we continue to welcome large volumes of immigrants and do not get these newcomers to learn French, francophones will become the minority in Quebec, and the federal government is contributing to that. If we do not increase immigration, Quebec will lose its political weight. We are trapped.

Canada has no problem welcoming lots of immigrants, but we know that almost all language transfers among francophones and allophones are to English. I think everyone would agree that English is not at risk in Canada, but French is at risk in Quebec. The only way to survive and to react as a nation is to protect our political weight.

With regard to Quebec's population, proportionally speaking, Quebec welcomed nearly twice as many immigrants as the United States and nearly two and a half times more than France. We have seen some projections showing that the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec stands to drop significantly in the next 20 years. However, with the new policy of bringing in more and more immigrants, that decline will happen even more quickly. We need to do something.

The Liberals talked about increasing the total number of immigrants received to 430,000 per year. This is significantly more than the 280,000 immigrants the Conservatives proposed to take in.

Quebec is a nation. It has an identity that is unique in the world, a history, a particular culture, a way of doing business, a common language. People's right to self-determination is perfectly normal. It would allow us to ensure the future of our language, our culture, our way of life. It is what the right to self-determination is all about.

Maurice Séguin, a historian who studied settler colonialism, said that if a people cannot decide for itself its own social, economic, cultural and political development, it is bound for dissolution. I think we have reached a breaking point.

We were able to counteract our minority status for a while because Quebec had a very high birth rate, especially prior to the 1960s. However, much like all western countries, our birth rate has declined. We depend more and more on immigration. We need the means to promote the use of French among immigrants, but we are losing even that power.

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The Canada-Quebec agreement gave us a certain amount of control over economic immigration, but the formula has changed more and more, and the government is mainly giving permanent residence to temporary workers and students. We recently saw that there is a much higher refusal rate for study permits for francophone students from African countries. Basically, I think we are reaching a breaking point.

If Quebec wants to continue to develop as a people, we need to at least be able to maintain our political weight in Parliament. That is why we moved this motion and that is why we are asking that any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts be rejected. We are proposing that Quebec always be able to maintain its political weight at 25% because we are a nation. We are the only French-speaking state in America, and we have a duty to resist, to defend French and cultural diversity in the world. We will see the reactions here. I call on all my colleagues to allow Quebec to maintain its political weight.

• (1635)

I also call on all my fellow Quebecers to take stock of the situation. If we do not succeed in doing this and if we do not succeed in amending the Official Languages Act to ensure the future of French, the only solution will be for Quebec to become independent.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his speech.

Before 2019, the quotas were approximately 50,000 immigrants per year. In recent years, that number has dropped to 40,000 immigrants per year in Quebec. I am wondering, however, why my colleague does not show as much passion for this issue when the Premier of Quebec, Mr. Legault, seems to be cutting the immigration quotas and reducing Quebec's demographic weight.

Is it by cutting quotas that Quebec will develop as a people?

• (1640)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Speaker, first of all, the current Quebec government has not decreased immigration that much. It has more or less stayed the same.

Second of all, as I was saying, we have two choices. If we increase immigration without sufficient means to teach these immigrants French and truly integrate them, francophones will become a minority in Quebec. If we reduce immigration, as the member said, our political weight will decrease.

I think Quebec, as a nation, should be able to set its own integration policies for newcomers. It should not be penalized for trying to make sure it can integrate the newcomers settling in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question. It has been interesting to hear this debate. It is a needed discussion on democratic reform in this country to ensure that our democracy is responsive to the demands of a modern nation. I come from Alberta and we are quite under-represented in this place when it comes to representation by population.

I find it very interesting that on a day when the Bloc is endeavouring to raise concerns related to Quebec and regional issues, in question period its leader and other members of the party went to great lengths to attack an industry that is well represented and that many of my constituents work in: the energy industry.

As I am listening with great interest to the speeches, can the member help me reconcile how talking about regional interests is not simply a Quebec issue, but also has a significant impact on the rest of the country?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend from the Conservative Party for his excellent question.

I think that the environment needs to be considered here. We are not against Alberta. We are in favour of combatting climate change, and we think we need to reduce our dependence on oil. We are prepared to help Alberta through the energy transition.

I do not think it will have a choice. If we want to secure an economic future, we ultimately cannot rely entirely on oil. That does not mean that we need to eradicate oil. We will still need it tomorrow. The issue in Quebec is a little different because we are a nation, a people, with a very different language and culture, and we want to continue to exist, much like the first nations want to continue to exist. We have nothing against the people of Alberta, despite our difference of opinion on environmental issues. I think that debate is the path to serenity.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to react to the suggestions that were made by members in their questions to the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

This brings me to a question that I have for him. It has been suggested to us that instead of asking to increase Quebec's political weight or keep it stable, Quebec should instead increase its immigration intake. My colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île just demonstrated that right now, we are not able to integrate or teach French to all newcomers, which also causes an internal problem.

To solve that, the Bloc Québécois is proposing a 25% threshold to be recognized as a nation. We could reconcile almost everything by doing that. That is what the Charlottetown accord proposed back in the day. That is what was proposed to Quebec. I would like to know what my colleague thinks of the fact that this was proposed to Quebec back then and that it seems unacceptable today.

• (1645)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Madam Speaker, we will see if our colleagues will consider this to be acceptable and we will draw our own conclusions. I hope that things have changed, but the result of the vote will give us our answer.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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 St. Albert—Edmonton, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, Health; the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York, COVID-19 Economic Measures.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to rise today to speak about Quebec's political weight.

On October 15, 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer published the new House of Commons seat allocation. This exercise is carried out every 10 years. Under the new allocation, the House would have four new seats for a total of 342 seats, but Quebec would only have 77, thus one less. This would decrease Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons from 23.1% to 22.5%. It would be the first time since 1966 that a province loses a seat.

Let us be clear. The Bloc Québécois opposes the reduction in Quebec's political weight. In listening to the debates today, I heard members speak about language, about affection for Quebec, about Quebec's importance and about the friendship between peoples and provinces. Quebec is all for that, but this is about much more than that. Quebec cannot be reduced to just its language, although language is a very strong component of its identity. Quebec is above all one of the founding peoples of the land that became Canada. As such, it deserves consideration that goes well beyond the stupid, malicious, and blind or automatic application of a mathematical formula.

Of course, we are not in any way blaming the Chief Electoral Officer here. This is not about placing blame. It is about us having a suggestion to make.

The suggestion is to go beyond a standard that is frozen in time. We cannot agree to apply this formula to the letter. The question that we should be asking ourselves throughout today's debate is this: Is this just about one province losing one seat and some of its political weight? Do we want to live in a country that denies representation to a part of its population?

Can the blind application of a mathematical formula be the only deciding factor or the only criterion in determining the representation of a nation, the Quebec nation in this case?

Demographics is a science that does not lie. People are born and they die. We know what age they are right now and when they can vote. The population of Canada is growing faster than that of Quebec. That is a fact. It is partly due to immigration policies that could be improved since they do not promote Quebec's population growth. Recently, we talked a lot about the unacceptable refusal rate for African students, for example. They were being refused at a rate of about 80%, while anglophone students who applied to come to Quebec were being refused at a rate of approximately 5% to 10%.

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If the current situation is maintained, and the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendation is implemented, Quebec will be trivialized. It will run the risk of losing its current identity. Unfortunately, that might suit some people, but I still believe that would not be good for anyone.

Quebec is a language, a culture, a way of life. Quebec is a potential that radiates around the world. Before I go any further, I would like to suggest some food for thought.

A decision of this magnitude cannot be taken lightly. The importance cannot be underestimated before a decision is made. I have heard today that the decision is to be made by an independent commission. Between us, it is ridiculous to believe that it will be a mere administrative decision. Some have said that the Bloc Québécois is making a political proposal today. Of course we are making a political proposal. This is a political debate. I do not think it could be anything other than political, when a political decision must be made.

When we have to make a decision, make a choice, which boils down to deciding, expressing a preference and choosing, there are two possibilities. Either there will be an existing rule, or there will not be an existing rule. In this case, there is one: a mathematical formula. However, when we want to make more of an ethical decision, we will ask four questions. The first is whether there is a rule. The answer is yes, there is. The second is whether there is an omission in the rule. That is not the case here. There is no omission. Then we have to ask whether there are two conflicting rules that say two different things. That is not the case here. The fourth question we have to ask is whether the rule is fair in the circumstances. I have to emphasize that point. Is the rule fair in the circumstances?

● (1650)

What we have here is an irregular case, where we cannot apply a rule without running the risk of being unjust. Being just is a colossal task, yet it is the task of MPs who will have to decide where they stand on this issue and vote accordingly.

Supposing that, in a case I described as irregular just now, the application of the rule would be unjust, we must see, think and do otherwise. If there is no just rule to apply, we have to turn to another element, which we call "values".

We have been brainwashed with great Canadian values for years. Everybody talks about values all the time, but what is a value, if not a statement of preference when there is no rule that can be justly applied?

A value is always a good and desirable thing. What values could we point to here that enable us to live together in this state of necessary cohabitation for the time being? I think we need to consider the concept of equity, which is a fair assessment of what each party is entitled to. I will share two examples. Say we have a pie, and we cut it into four slices, and we have one person who is diabetic and another who is not hungry. We might not end up with four equal slices, but it will still be just.

Business of Supply

Being treated justly is different than being equal. The latter means that everyone is the same. We will agree that we are not all the same. We speak French, we see things differently and live differently.

I believe that we should amend the formula for seat allocation. To lose representation is to disappear, and to disappear is to die. To borrow the words of an author I really enjoy, Fernando Pessoa, who is not a philosopher, "To die is to slip out of view".

To avoid slipping out of view, the Bloc Québécois is proposing a motion that breaks down as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House: (a) any scenario for redrawing the federal electoral map that would result in Quebec losing one or more electoral districts or that would reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons must be rejected;

Members are being asked to take a stand on this matter. The second part of the motion states:

(b) the formula for apportioning seats in the House must be amended and the House call on the government to act accordingly.

I want to share a few facts. Obviously, the distribution formula is enshrined in the Constitution Act, 1867. That is nothing new. The Chief Electoral Officer, or CEO, does not have the authority to determine the number of seats in the House of Commons. He or she has the power to propose riding boundaries but not to change the number of ridings. The only way to change the number and distribution of seats, set out in section 51 of the British North America Act, is through legislation. As we have heard today, section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which Quebec did not sign, authorizes the federal Parliament to make such changes.

It is hard to amend the Constitution, though. Nevertheless, two weeks ago, we were talking about the Constitution in relation to Saskatchewan, and that was not too difficult or painful. Even though it is hard to amend a constitution, I remind members that the Constitution of the Athenians, so dear to Aristotle, served as a model for constitutions.

Two thousand years later, that constitution has been amended. It has served as an inspiration and evolved because the context has evolved. Making such a change takes an ingredient called courage, which does not exist in theory, only in practice. Given that we are at the beginning of a process of evaluating electoral reform, I believe that the time has come to seriously address the issue. How do we want to live: by losing or by changing?

I very much like the word used by one of the members today who was asking if we could stop changing the representations and if we could "set" a representation. I think that is an option worth exploring.

I will again make reference to the ancient Greeks, who had several words to designate time. There was one word for the weather, one for the time for going to work, which was *chronos*, and there was one word that I like a lot, *kairos*, meaning the right time.

• (1655)

We do not tell flowers when to grow. We have to wait for the right time. That is why it is called that. I should also note that, if we wait too long after the right time, it is no longer the right time.

I think this is the right time, at the start of this process, and I think members of the House should exert their influence to send a clear message. I do not believe the members opposite hate Quebec, especially not the member for Outremont. I do not think we are acting against one another, but I do think we need to use the powers we have to approve this motion and vote in favour.

I would invite the Conservative members. I see them all here. We always enjoy talking to them. I would invite the New Democrats, the Greens, the independents and the Liberals. We are all here together in the House, and I invite them to recognize the importance of Quebec.

I will close with a quote from Maria Ossowska, a Polish philosopher who lived during the Second World War and experienced the atrocities we are familiar with. In 1946, she said that, in ethics and in politics, the important thing was to be decent. She added that being decent is to be well socialized, have an open mind, be intellectually honest, be able to think critically and respect one's own word.

The time has come to recognize Quebec's political weight and to acknowledge that the seat distribution formula needs to be changed. Quebec's demographic importance is clearly declining, but we will never be small.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I really enjoyed it.

I want to point out that the Bloc talked about the Constitution a number of times and about how Quebec did not sign it. However, it is interesting to note that members also pointed out in this debate just how important the Canadian Constitution is.

My question is about the philosophical point my colleague made about "the right time". We could have debated this issue as part of Private Members' Business. Would that not have been a more appropriate time?

Why did the Bloc Québécois choose to move this motion on an opposition day when a private member's bill on the same subject is going to be introduced in just a few weeks?

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois felt that this was the wisest choice. There were a number of options available to us, but we believed the moment had come to take action in this regard.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Madam Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has been a wonderful neighbour to Quebec and vice versa. I cannot help but mention that earlier today, on two occasions, I was very disappointed to hear the Bloc members asking for Bay du Nord to be turned down.

Between Saudi Arabia and Russia right now, they produce 20 million barrels of oil a day. Does the member think that Canada would be better off producing some of those 20 million barrels of oil a day in an ethical manner and that we could all be neighbours and friends who benefit from that?

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. I will answer candidly. I am not an economist.

Oil exists and oil production will continue to exist. We are not against oil as such, but there is a way of seeing the future of the planet that leads us to believe that perhaps we need to mitigate its use.

By the way, I believe that oil from Algeria will arrive in Europe before Canadian oil because the infrastructure is already in place. However, I will let the experts respond to this question since I am not one of them and I am not too proud to admit it.

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

I would like him to comment on the statements we heard from members opposite. Some are accusing us of quoting sections of the Constitution and, at the same time, saying that we did not sign it.

That is an ethical issue. I would like my colleague to explain the work we are doing today.

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, my colleague raises a very important point. It is a fact that we did not sign the Constitution Act of 1982. Unfortunately, we are stuck with it in negotiating this type of arrangement. We must refer to something, so we are forced to refer to the Constitution.

Our first choice would definitely be to have our own constitution and to look after our own affairs.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have had a lot of discussion from this member and the previous member about the importance of immigration as a factor. When we take a look at what we are doing today and population shifts, the future in good part, in terms of our population growth, is going to be through immigration.

Today, with what is happening in Ukraine, we are anticipating that there could be thousands and thousands of refugees. If it was up to me, it would be a rather high number. Does the member feel that the Province of Quebec would be open to receiving people from Ukraine as refugees, as other provinces have indicated an interest to?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, Quebec's premier has already stated that he would like to do so, but I will respond directly to my colleague's question.

Business of Supply

There is a lot of talk about Ukrainian refugees. Out of solidarity, we really have to do something. We agree. However, we have to admit that Ukraine is not a third world country. People are stuck, and they want to stay there. It is only right that we open the door, but we must also realize that sending aid to Ukraine is also very important.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned earlier that no one in the House is evil.

I grew up in an anglophone environment, and of course there are no major differences between people on an individual level. Culturally, however, there are some differences.

How does my colleague explain, for example, that in many provinces there are not enough schools for francophones at the moment? Some efforts are being made and this has gone all the way to the Supreme Court, but the governments of these provinces are not following through. Something is up. Francophones have voluntarily assimilated just about everywhere, but there is no culpability or desire for redress.

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Speaker, we are facing this concept of institutional completeness. We must recognize that the bills that have passed over the years have favoured bilingualism. Bilingualism treats both languages the same. The fact is, French is in an asymmetrical situation, and it is not true that the two languages are equal or will be considered equal.

Not enough resources are being dedicated to French across Canada. Schools and services are lacking. If I went to Winnipeg North, for example, I am not sure I would be served in French. I would be sad, but that might be the case. In Quebec, however, promoting bilingualism means killing the francophonie.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I apologize, but I am going to ask my question in English to make sure I word it correctly.

[English]

I am interested in why the Bloc will not take up the idea of actually capping the number of seats in the House of Commons. They are constitutionally protected in Quebec to have 75 seats in the House. If the Bloc were to suggest that 338 is where we should leave the number of representatives in the House, that would mean that Quebec would be ultimately constitutionally protected to have 22% representation.

Why are they choosing to move in this fashion? I understand they are sovereigntists, but why are we not moving in a fashion to say this is another way of capping the number of MPs in the House and still allowing Quebec to have strong representation that would be guaranteed?

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I like what my colleague said. I think his proposal is clear, has merit and should be considered.

Points of Order

However, the reason we are doing this today is simple. We are simply offering an answer, a solution to an issue that in the past has not been taken seriously enough. This is our answer to a question that has so far remained unanswered. That is why we are moving forward with this today.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have listened attentively to the members' speeches, both this member and the members previous to this. New Democrats are firmly in support of ensuring we recognize Quebec and its unique situation, unique culture and unique language. I believe there is a lot more work that has to be done to ensure we continue to recognize nationhood, not just in Quebec but across Canada. I come from the Métis community and I have spent a great deal of time trying to ensure that our languages, the Michif language and the Cree language, continue to survive here in our native land and place.

Could the member speak to the importance of ensuring that indigenous people are also granted this form of recognition in this country?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton for his suggestion.

Quebec is willing to recognize a nation from its inception. A nation sets itself apart through, and is defined by, its language, which reflects its culture.

We are fully willing to recognize other cultures, nations and languages. We have always been in favour of that.

I welcome his suggestion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[English]

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

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 2, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel on a point of order.

[English]

An hon. member: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, could we suspend for a minute or two? We have another speaker on their way. We just need another minute so they can get here.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, no. The question has been called.

* * *

● (1710)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ROYAL RECOMMENDATION FOR BILL C-237

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Yesterday evening, Monday, February 28, the Speaker said:

I would encourage members who would like to make arguments regarding the requirement for a royal recommendation with respect to [Bill] C-237...to do so at an early opportunity.

I am rising on a point of order this evening in relation to that.

I admit that I was surprised by this statement. Royal recommendation is the mechanism by which a private member's bill cannot have any financial implications unless it is recommended by the Crown.

Financial implications refers to both new expenditures and reallocation of funds for other purposes. Bill C-237, which I am introducing, does not do either.

In my view, it is clear that Bill C-237 does not require a royal recommendation and has the potential to be voted on by the House at all stages and implemented, for the following five reasons.

First, it does not require any new spending.

Second, it does not change the transfer amounts, nor does it change the names of the beneficiaries or how the funding is allocated to them.

Third, it does not change the purpose of the transfer. The Canada health transfer will still be dedicated to paying for health care. The same goes for other transfers that are allocated to a province if it has "a program whose objectives are comparable to those of a federal program".

Fourth, it does not force the executive's hand, which retains the latitude and margin of appreciation required to transfer the funds. That prerogative remains in place. The executive will decide whether the province has a comparable program and will determine whether the province is complying with the conditions in the Canada Health Act.

Finally, precedents are on my side. There have been many bills that have changed the normative framework without any financial implications. I actually found 31 bills that amend the Canada Health Act, and not one required a royal recommendation.

For all these reasons, I believe that Bill C-237 does not require a royal recommendation.

Let us examine it in detail. Bill C-237 amends the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act in two ways.

It provides all interested provinces with the opportunity to opt out of a federal program that falls under the legislative authority of the provinces. In that case, the government can pay the province a transfer equivalent to the contribution that it would have received had it not withdrawn. This means that it is an equal amount or a zero sum.

The bill adds that the government will only pay the contribution if the province “has a program whose objectives are comparable to those of a federal program”. In short, the purpose of the transfer does not change either.

This mechanism is quite similar to the one that exists in the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, for example. If a province has its own program and withdraws from the federal program, it receives the same transfer that it would have received had it not withdrawn.

The transfer is unconditional and goes into the province's consolidated revenue fund, but only if it has a comparable program. It is up to the minister to determine whether it has a comparable program.

Without any conditions on how the province runs the program, the transfer still serves the same purpose, which is to ensure that students can access financial assistance.

• (1715)

This same principle is in Bill C-237, which I introduced. It does not change the amounts or recipients, the distribution of the amounts among them, or the purpose of the transfer. It simply reduces federal control over the management of provincial programs in the provinces' own jurisdictions. Again, this is about provincial management of provincial programs. That is the only thing that is impacted here, and it has little to do with the prerogative of the federal Crown.

Bill C-237 proposes a second amendment to the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, this one just for Quebec. The federal government has announced that it plans to set conditions applicable to long-term care facilities and retirement homes. I assume that they will be included in the Canada Health Act, since long-term care facilities fall under the definition of “extended health care services” in the act.

Since Quebec was the only one to object, Bill C-231 would exempt Quebec, and only Quebec, from the Canada Health Act, much like the proposal by my colleague from Montcalm to exempt Quebec from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in his Bill C-226 in the 43rd Parliament, which did not require a royal recommendation.

The Canada Health Act does not have financial implications per se. It sets out a normative framework, five principles for the government to consider in the Canada health transfer, which is provided for in the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. It is the latter act that has financial implications.

My bill, Bill C-237, does not change the purpose of the Canada health transfer. It does not change the purpose of the transfer de-

finied in paragraph 24(b) of the fiscal arrangements act as “contributing to providing the best possible health care system for Canadians and to making information about the health care system available to Canadians”. Bill C-237 does not change this section of the act, which sets out the purpose of the transfer.

Under the Canada Health Act, the government is responsible for determining whether the provinces are in compliance. In Bill C-237, the government determines whether the province has “a program whose objectives are comparable”. Personally, I would have preferred not to include that clause in Bill C-237, but I realized that this would have changed the purpose of the transfers and could therefore have required a royal recommendation.

Bill C-237 has no financial implications in terms of the amounts, their destination, their purpose or the general conditions. Only specific conditions in the Canada Health Act are affected.

Madam Speaker, I hear a lot of noise in the House and I am having a hard time delivering my speech.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Indeed, there is noise. I am not sure if it is in the House. Some of our colleagues may want to go into the lobbies to continue their discussions so that the hon. member can go on with his point of order.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Madam Speaker, I appreciate your intervention.

Only the specific conditions of the Canada Health Act are affected. The Speaker has ruled on many occasions that playing within these standards does not generate or reallocate an expenditure and therefore does not require a royal recommendation.

In the 27 years since the start of the 35th Parliament, when bills began to be tracked in the LEGISinfo parliamentary module, no fewer than 31 private members' bills have proposed amendments to the Canada Health Act.

All of them added new conditions. Some required the province to develop new services in order to receive the Canada health transfer. Others imposed requirements on how health services had to be delivered in order to receive the transfer. Others prohibited access to the Canada health transfer for provinces that provide certain free services, in this case abortion. I will let the members guess which party recommended that.

The Chair did not require a royal recommendation for any of these bills, not one. Of course, not all of them were on the order of precedence, so the Chair did not have to rule on many of them. However, in some cases, the Chair did have to do so.

Take Bill C-282, introduced during the 36th Parliament by the Liberal member for Ottawa—Vanier, the late Mauril Bélanger, a great defender of the rights of Franco-Ontarians. He introduced the bill in response to the crisis surrounding the Montfort Hospital, a francophone hospital in Ottawa that the Ontario government had tried to close.

Private Members' Business

The bill introduced a new condition in the Canada Health Act to set new language requirements for French-language services in the provinces and English-language services in Quebec. If the province did not meet these conditions, the minister could cut the transfer. The bill was placed on the order of precedence without the Chair indicating that it required a royal recommendation. It was subsequently debated.

If members consult the March 19, 2003, Hansard, they will see that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health spoke on behalf of the Crown in the debate. He never made any mention of a royal recommendation. On the contrary, he asked members to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Official Languages before second reading because “The federal government cannot and must not act unilaterally in a shared provincial jurisdiction. Any decision to broaden the scope of the Canada Health Act requires extensive consultations with the provinces”. In short, he asked the House not to pass the bill, even while recognizing that it had the right to do so.

I will give another example, that of Bill C-213, an act to enact the Canada pharmacare act, which was introduced by the member for New Westminster—Burnaby and voted on by the House at second reading on February 24, 2021. This bill basically creates a new transfer.

According to clause 4 of this bill, “The purpose of this Act is to establish criteria and conditions that must be met before a cash contribution may be made in respect of public drug insurance plans.” After setting out the specific conditions, the bill indicates that the minister “may” make a transfer to the provinces to fund a provincial drug program.

It is important to note that the bill does not set out a specific amount. I understand that it was specifically written that way so as to not generate any new spending and therefore not require royal recommendation. It worked. Even though the bill created a new transfer, even though it set out specific goals and conditions, it did not require royal recommendation because it did not generate any new spending.

If we apply the same logic to Bill C-237, we can come to only one conclusion. This bill does not require a royal recommendation.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member have the agreement of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1725)

[English]

REUNITING FAMILIES ACT

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved that Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (temporary resident visas for parents and grandparents), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about a bill that I think is going to make a dramatic difference in the lives of many Canadian families.

In 2011, our Conservative government brought in the super visa. The super visa is a 10-year, multiple-entry visa that allows families to reunite with parents and grandparents. They were allowed to stay for two years over 10, and there were certain conditions with respect to that visa. They had to undergo a medical exam and be admissible on medical grounds. They had to have provided satisfactory evidence of private medical insurance, and the host child or grandchild had to have certain financial means in order for the parent or grandparent to qualify to come to Canada and be eligible for the super visa.

This has been a fantastic tool for families to reunite in Canada over the past 11 years. It is one of the things I am very proud of, as I was part of the government that brought that in. What we have learned over the past 11 years, however, is that this is something that could be improved. In fact, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration studied this in 2016 and heard from stakeholders about the challenges that exist with the super visa.

My bill would do three things. Number one, it would extend the time that a parent or grandparent could stay in Canada from two to five years, which is going to be an incredible benefit to families. Imagine being able to have a parent or grandparent there for five months every year over 10 years, to spend time with a person and their children. This would make things so much better for Canadian families.

Number two, the issue of health insurance has been brought up. It is costly. The bill would address that. It would allow for the purchase of insurance from outside of Canada, as approved by the minister.

Number three, the bill would require the minister and the government to prepare a report on reducing the minimum income requirement that a child or grandchild of a foreign national must meet.

I am going to go into the importance of these improvements, and why the bill is going to mean so much for Canadian families. Health care and private health insurance can be enormously costly for families and can range up to \$5,000 per year. In addition, families are looking at paying for the cost of a flight back and forth. This was clearly heard in the evidence that was brought before the committee.

Private Members' Business

What we have to point out is that someone has to be medically admissible before they are eligible for the super visa. That health check has to be provided as a precondition to the super visa being issued. We are not talking about people who have health care, health conditions and health concerns. By allowing insurance from other countries, this will lower the cost of insurance.

I believe this, because I believe that competition is a good thing. If one can purchase insurance from an American insurance company, a British insurance company or an Indian insurance company, and the list goes on and on, this will create competition for Canadian insurance companies and it is going to lower the cost to these families.

Some will say that maybe this could be an insurance company that would not pay. That is why I have included a safeguard in the bill. It is as approved by the minister, so insurance companies that say they want to be eligible to provide their products to this could make a submission to the minister. The minister has the capacity, the skill and the knowledge to ensure that this is an insurance company that would be able to pay for any health claims that are made while in Canada.

The bill would lower the cost of insurance for those trying to use the super visa, and we have a safeguard in place that would make sure that no health care system or health care provider in the country would be left with an unpaid claim.

The other issue is the income part of this: the low-income cut-off. This is a challenge, especially for new Canadian families, when they are struggling to actually build the lives that they wanted to build in this country.

• (1730)

They may be working in jobs that do not pay a lot. They work very hard, and with the income test as it is, many Canadian families are excluded from being able to apply because they are not going to meet that income test.

When I think about this, I think what the extra cost would be if my parents came to stay with me for five months. We can debate whether or not I would want my parents to come and stay with me for five months, but that is of course a different topic. Many people do want that, but there really is not a significant cost involved in that. It is not a cost that would require a family to somehow become financially insecure or financially unable to meet their obligations.

The income test itself does not make sense to me, which is why the bill would require the government to table, within one year, a plan to lower the low-income cut-off and the income required. There may be some criticism of that, saying we may therefore have problems. That is actually not what the committee study showed in 2016. What we saw in the evidence presented at committee was that having a parent or grandparent come and stay with family was actually a boon, in an economic sense. Those parents sometimes were able to provide extra child care, so the family could take an extra shift or maybe work some overtime, and their economic situation actually improved.

It is kind of the opposite of what we think, or the perception being put forward of the low-income cut-off: that somehow this is go-

ing to be detrimental to the family. When we look at how this will expand opportunities for families, we have to consider how important it is for families to be able to reunite with their parents and grandparents, so that children can spend time with their grandparents. There are important lessons we learn from our grandparents and having them as part of our families.

In many communities across Canada, there are multi-generational homes where having the parents and grandparents there is an important cultural aspect of life. Why are we limiting this on the assumption that somehow having our parents or grandparents come and stay with us for a few months is some kind of financial burden?

I talked to communities all across this country before I introduced the bill. This has been unanimously approved by them. They are excited about the prospect of having their loved ones be able to come to Canada for a longer period of time. They are excited that health insurance costs would be reduced to make it more affordable, and they are more than excited that by lowering the low-income cut-off, more families are going to be eligible for the super visa.

I am encouraging my colleagues from the government to support this bill. This will be good for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I look forward to questions from the members opposite, and I hope I will have their support to pass the bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I look forward to being able to contribute more fulsomely to the discussion on this piece of legislation that the member is proposing. For now, I am very much interested.

Is the scope of the legislation just to deal with international insurance agencies outside of Canada, and is the primary purpose to ensure that there is competition?

• (1735)

Mr. Kyle Seebach: Madam Speaker, I would not say the primary purpose is so that there is competition. The primary purpose is that there would be more insurance companies that people could speak to, to try to find a better price. It is the cost of buying insurance. We should especially imagine a new Canadian family that is just trying to get themselves established. A \$4,000 or \$5,000 bill to have their parents or grandparents come to visit them might actually make it impossible for them to do so. By having more options, I think the price will come down and make it more affordable for Canadian families from coast to coast to coast.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Dufferin—Caledon for his bill as well. There are many issues we need to address with respect to the parent and grandparent reunification process. Until we get there, I think this is a good interim measure.

One thing the member did not include in his bill is the opportunity for families whose parent and grandparent sponsorship application process was rejected to be able to appeal the decision. I wonder if the member would be open to an amendment to allow the appeal process to be brought back for the parent and grandparent reunification application process.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, that is a great suggestion. It is one I would look forward to being moved at committee. I think we should study it to make sure it is something that is feasible. Yes, I am absolutely open to that amendment.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this great, compassionate and very thoughtful bill.

The member for Vancouver East touched on the parent and grandparent reunification process. Over the last three years, there has been a very bad transition, and the grandparent and parent classes have suffered for so long because of the backlogs the federal government created in immigration. We have heard stories about this throughout the pandemic, how people needed their parents and grandparents.

My hon. colleague for Dufferin—Caledon mentioned that it also enables one person to return to the workforce when a grandparent or parent is here. On top of that, with this pandemic, people need mental health supports, as we have seen mental health diminish in this country.

Can the member elaborate a bit more on how this bill will address those issues?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, my colleague raises a great point there. When I suggested one person could stay for five months every year for 10 years, that person could also stay for a year or two. Imagine the economic benefit to people who have their parents here with them when they have their first child. They could be here for the first year to offer not only emotional support, but also economic support and a reduction in day care costs, as well as the opportunity to continue to work.

The backlogs in the parent and grandparent family reunification process have gotten massively out of control under the current Liberal government. This bill will actually help ease some of that strain because more parents and grandparents would qualify under this bill, and they would be able to stay longer. It would also take some of the pressure off the terrible backlogs we have right now.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could comment quickly on what this bill might do for reducing the wait times our immigration system faces and relieving some of the pressure it sees.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, super visas generally get processed faster than other types of applications, so having the super visa expanded to more Canadians is absolutely going to get people reunited with their families faster than any other immigration stream. I think it would contribute immensely to that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is an issue I am fairly passionate about. When I was on the opposition benches, I was actually the critic for immigration. I have a lot of memories from when Stephen Harper was prime minister.

I sure wish the member had shared his concerns back then. In opposition, I remember when Stephen Harper actually shut down the program to sponsor parents and grandparents. Imagine, that was put in an absolute total freeze, so people could not even sponsor a par-

ent or grandparent. That actually took place. Then, a couple of years later, it was opened up again, and the former government said we could have 5,000 parents and grandparents come to Canada on an annual basis.

The good news is that government was replaced with a more progressive government. This Liberal government recognizes just how important parents and grandparents are. Within the first couple of years, we more than doubled the number of parents and grandparents who were able to be sponsored. The types of numbers we are hitting today are well over 20,000. We can contrast that to the previous government's, and look at the processing times.

When I was critic, we were talking six, seven or more years to get parents and grandparents to Canada. The member was talking about seniors. I will go further, and I will say that seniors, especially those who are coming as permanent residents or as visitors, contribute in a very positive way, not only to the families but also to the economy, either directly or indirectly. This is the type of thing we need to recognize, right up front.

Just because one is 70 years old or 75 years old does not mean they cannot contribute in a very positive way. I am 60, and approaching 70 awfully quick. People have a lot to offer. This is one of the reasons we, in the Liberal caucus, have made seniors a priority. I say that knowing that the Minister of Seniors is listening to this debate, because she knows full well just how important our seniors are, those who are living in Canada, as well as those coming to visit Canada.

We want to encourage that. We want people to be able to invite their moms and dads and grandparents to come to Canada. We also have to take into consideration what provinces have to say. We need to realize that one of the things about the 70-plus age group, generally speaking, is there is often more of a need for health care requirements. When we talk about the super visa, which I am a big fan of, I believe it is responsible to ensure there is some form of insurance for individuals coming over in certain situations.

I am glad we have those super visas. Prior to that, typically parents would come to visit their child, a fully grown adult, and would be here for a year. Three months prior to that visa expiring, they would put in an application for an extension. That would happen year after year. Parents who came under the one-year visa would actually be in Canada, and would be here for six, seven, eight years through extensions, never having left Canada.

● (1740)

It only stands to reason, as the demand continues to grow, that we try to put in policies that will in fact help facilitate parents and grandparents being able to meet with their children, young and old, here in Canada.

Private Members' Business

We talk about the important role they play in society, and it goes far beyond what I have heard today. I wanted to contribute to the debate because I think of it in terms of their being the rock of the family, when there is a grandparent who shares their stories and wisdom, their personal heritage and how they grew up. They often contribute to the child's well-being. A person may have a parent coming from India, the Philippines or any other place around the world, and what often happens, because of their love for their grandchild, is that they end up watching over that child so that mom and dad can go do grocery shopping or do some visiting. They build up a very healthy relationship, and quite often they provide stability in the family by being here.

I have seen many families who have had a parent come over, and the parent is actually assisting them, directly or indirectly, in their business. A very dear friend of mine, Geurtin Jamoli, has a wonderful restaurant, and I got to know some of the individuals because of Canada's policy of getting and encouraging parents and grandparents to come over.

The thoughts I have are shared virtually universally within the Liberal caucus. We understand it. We encourage it. Members can see that in the actions we have taken to date, where we continue to see the numbers grow. My colleagues and I, and I suspect even members of the opposition, will write letters of support so that we can encourage immigration officials from other countries to approve visiting visas, and at times that can be a challenge in itself.

However, there is no doubt that, in terms of the cost, insurance is an issue. I have not sat on the immigration committee for a while and do not know if its members have raised this issue. I would be open to some ideas and thoughts on that. I would encourage the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and those who might be following this debate to listen and see if there are some viable options out there.

I can tell members that we have a very aggressive, progressive Minister of Immigration. We have all sorts of things on the agenda, such as refugees whether from Syria or now Ukraine. All members or at least most, definitely all from within the Liberal caucus, are encouraging the government to look at ways we can do more for Ukraine on the immigration file, and even though that is such an important file, we still make time for parents and grandparents.

I would welcome and invite members of the public or anyone to take a look at what we have been able to accomplish in the last six or seven years on this important file. However, that does not mean that there is no room for improvement. We are constantly looking for ways to improve, because we recognize the many contributions parents and grandparents make to our society. If we recognize that in a holistic way, it enables us to have bigger and better immigration programs in general.

I appreciate, as I always do, the opportunity to talk about immigration inside the House of Commons. I appreciate what the member is suggesting. I would recommend that he bring the issue to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in the hope that we could actually look at what alternatives might be out there.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-242, because not only was I a member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, as the member for Winnipeg North mentioned, but, as a lawyer in my previous practice, I worked with families who wanted to bring their parents and grandparents to Canada.

In working with these families, I saw to what extent the logistics, red tape and delays were an onerous administrative burden. What these families often wanted was to sponsor their parents or grandparents and bring them here permanently.

In that context, not only does the super visa provide the opportunity to have one's parents here while the sponsorship and permanent residence application is being processed, but it is another option for those not picked in the lottery. The lottery system is very restrictive, and few people manage to get chosen to submit a sponsorship application for parents and grandparents. The super visa is therefore a useful option.

Given the administrative burden of immigration procedures, I am very much in favour of the opportunity to make them less onerous. What is a super visa? What do we want to change?

The super visa is valid for 10 years. It does not permit the holder to work during their stay. It allows multiple entries over a period of up to two years. It requires the applicant to have medical insurance from a Canadian company that is valid for at least one year from the time of entry. Lastly, it requires the applicant to prove that the child or grandchild who will be hosting them here has the financial capacity to support them. This means that there is a minimum income threshold that must be proven by the child or grandchild in order for the parent or grandparent to be issued the visa.

The member for Dufferin—Caledon's bill addresses the last three points that I mentioned. Before I get into the details of the bill, I want to say at the outset that my Bloc colleagues and I will be supporting the bill.

The bill has a relatively limited and minor impact on the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It does not put a burden on the government, because we are talking about temporary status. There is no service or financial aspect to making this application for parents or grandparents. It accounts for a very small number of the temporary residence permits that are issued. Year in and year out, of the 1.6 million or 1.9 million applications, about 20,000 are for a super visa. This represents about 1% to 2% of applications. The impact on Canada is relatively small, but the positive effects on families are major. In light of this, it is important to support the bill.

Private Members' Business

One of the legislative amendments proposed in the bill would allow individuals to purchase health insurance from insurance companies outside Canada. The length of stay allowed would be increased from two years to five years. The bill also requires that the minister conduct a new review of the minimum income requirement to obtain a visa for a parent or grandparent.

Existing legislation requires that individuals have valid insurance coverage for at least one year from the date of entry. This insurance must cover at least \$100,000 and be obtained from a Canadian provider. This is set out in the legislation. Some basic research shows that this type of insurance is very expensive. For someone relatively young, in their 40s, without any pre-existing health conditions, it would cost around \$1,000 to \$1,500. For someone who is a little older or who has some pre-existing health conditions, that kind of coverage can cost up to \$6,000 to \$7,000 a year. For a couple, that is \$12,000 a year, on top of the other fees associated with immigration.

● (1750)

By opening things up to competition, we take away Canadian companies' monopoly on this type of insurance coverage. We also hope it will reduce the cost of coverage. It will also allow some foreign nationals to combine this insurance coverage with a policy they already have for their home or auto. People might be able to save money.

This bill also ensures that there will be no problem harmonizing insurance coverage and claims for hospitals, for example, because the insurance companies will have to be pre-approved by the minister. We can expect a study on the possibility of submitting claims to these approved insurance companies.

The second point the bill covers is extending the stay from two years to five years. This would limit the number of return trips parents and grandparents have to make between Canada and their home country for the duration of the super visa. Those plane tickets cost money. This measure alone will significantly reduce costs.

The two-year permit has to get renewed. The person has to have another medical exam to get the insurance premium. It is therefore possible that during the 10-year period there is a change in health status, and consequently an increase in the premium, which potentially makes it harder for some parents and grandparents to get their coverage.

I did not mention that the visa also came with the requirement to submit to a medical exam. If it has to be renewed every two years, the person is a little more vulnerable. There is less predictability with respect to eligibility.

Finally, with respect to the low-income cut-off, the evidence of being on fairly solid financial ground to welcome one's parents or grandparents, the bill does not propose lowering or eliminating it. It proposes that the minister conduct a study on the need to keep the cut-off at the same level or just maintain it, full stop. That being said, many people are talking about repealing it outright. In the event that the minister, within a period of two years, wishes to keep the low-income cut-off where it is, he will have to explain why.

This is not a very compelling bill for parliamentarians in that regard. It seeks a review of the relevance of a legislative measure, something that it seems to me is always seen in a positive light.

I would like to mention that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration already looked into something similar and made a recommendation regarding the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. The committee stated, and I quote:

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada allow the income requirements for the parent and grandparent sponsorship program to be the minimum necessary income equal to the low-income cut-off established by Statistics Canada for the years impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting a yearly review to determine whether to extend allowing the minimum necessary income to be equivalent to the low-income cut-off, all while respecting Quebec's jurisdiction.

That raises another issue. In some cases, in a recession year, for example, people may find that they are no longer eligible for a visa simply for reasons that are beyond their control. It would be a good idea to look into that.

In passing, I want to mention that, when it comes to spousal sponsorships, Quebec does not even assess the spouses' financial capacity, and it works very well.

The study on this aspect could help determine whether this threshold is appropriate in different places across Canada. The cost of living is not the same everywhere, as we know. Could there be different sponsors depending on where the individuals will be living? That would be a positive and would also acknowledge the fact that many families see a positive financial impact when parents and grandparents come, since it allows them to rejoin the job market.

For all of these good reasons, we suggest that the bill be supported.

● (1755)

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP has always seen family reunification as a pivotal component of Canada's immigration system. All families want to do is be reunited with their loved ones, and they should not have to go through such hardship to be with their parents or grandparents, who are every bit a part of the family unit as what we have come to call immediate family.

In western culture, the nuclear family of two parents and their children has come to be seen as the basic unit to be protected. While this is the norm in many western countries, it is not so for different parts of the world. For them, extended family members are often viewed as immediate family members. Research has shown that when a family network includes parents and grandparents, it makes the settlement and integration process much easier on newcomers. It also confirms the essential role parents and grandparents play in supporting the healthy development of youth. Families are particularly important in the maintenance of the well-being of racialized communities, members of the disability community and women.

Prior to 2011, the parents and grandparents sponsorship program had the same process as spousal and dependent sponsorship streams of immigration. The application went through the system until it was ultimately approved or rejected. Unfortunately, successive Liberal and Conservative governments continually failed to provide sufficient immigration levels and staffing resources to process the applications in a timely manner. Consequently, too many families waited nearly a decade to be reunited with their loved ones. Instead of increasing resources to address the growing backlog, both the Liberals and the Conservatives chose to put a cap on the parents and grandparents sponsorship applications. The Harper administration even had a moratorium on new applications for two years. It was well known that the application cap would always be hit mere hours into the IRCC accepting them, leaving tens of thousands of Canadians unable to even apply.

The Liberals then went on to an arbitrary lottery system, which was a fiasco from the get-go. It is the only immigration stream that is based on the luck of the draw. This ill-conceived system fell flat on its face with multiple problems, and 500 of the 10,000 applications were lost to families in 2017. Forced to admit failure, the Liberals scrapped the lottery system and went back to the breakneck race to beat the application cap approach. In that instance, within seven minutes the application process was shut down because of the cap having reached its limit. This process also did not take into consideration the inherent disparities within the system, such as the lack of access to high-speed Internet in some communities and those with disabilities or impairments.

The media revealed that a number of individuals who were not able to submit an application to reunite with their loved ones under the parents and grandparents reunification process filed a lawsuit against the government. The government then quietly settled with the litigants by offering them 70 coveted spots in the parents and grandparents sponsorship program.

All of this is to say that the handling of the parents and grandparents sponsorship program has been disastrous. Too many families remain separated for years. That is why the NDP has been calling for the lifting of the quota, with increased staffing resources and increased levels numbers to address this ongoing issue. We are also calling for reasonable service standards to be set in the processing of the applications.

Until then, some families turn to the super visa program as an alternative. However, the program has numerous shortcomings. The super visa applicant is required to purchase a medical insurance

plan with \$100,000 in emergency medical coverage from a Canadian insurance company. This is prohibitively expensive.

This bill aims to partially address these issues, and while I support the bill, it must be recognized that it is only a stopgap measure.

In addition to the points that I have already made, it is essential that we bring back the appeals process for the parents and grandparents stream. I met a family that was rejected for the program in their third year of meeting the onerous financial requirements because they went on maternity leave for one month. As a result of that, the family's income dipped and their dream of reuniting with their parents vanished. This is wrong, and an appeals process with some ability to provide flexibility would have accommodated that temporary change in circumstances.

• (1800)

On the call around the onerous financial burden, it would be important to reduce the financial undertakings required of families to be eligible to ensure a system that genuinely recognizes the value of familial unity over financial interests. If we truly value parents and grandparents in our society, we must disabuse ourselves of the notion that these so-called extended family members are somehow a burden on our society. It is often forgotten that many are able to work full time or part time, volunteer in our communities or provide child care to their families. It is time the government updated its views of the contributions of parents and grandparents in more than just words but actions through Canada's immigration system.

The proposed bill aims to address these issues, and the NDP supports the bill going to committee so that we can invite witnesses to examine the bill and put forward amendments. Equally important is having the government look at the financial requirements and the onerous requirements put on the family sponsorship application process for parents and grandparents.

In fact, at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration we studied this issue and invited witnesses and experts to come forward. The vast majority, if not all of them, said that this needs to change, that the financial requirements are far too burdensome. Many called for the government to lift the cap to ensure more families are able to reunite with their loved ones. I know this is not part of this bill, but it is something the NDP supports wholeheartedly.

I heard over and over again in the last number of years sitting in this place all parties talk about how much they value the contributions of family members, yet repeatedly when given the chance, whether when Conservatives were in government or now that the Liberals are in government, they do not truly address the issue. They come in with stopgap measures and then we find ourselves here again. As a result, what is left is that too many families have their loved ones separated.

Private Members' Business

I want to take a moment to also talk about extended families. In this instance, we are talking about parents and grandparents, but I know a lot of communities view extended family such as adult siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins as part of their immediate family. We have seen that with the Syrian refugee initiative. Many of them want to be able to sponsor their extended family members to come to Canada, but they have been experiencing extreme difficulties as the immigration measures do not allow for that. We need to update our view of what immediate family is to be consistent with many of the newcomers who have come to Canada and made Canada their home.

I hope this bill will make it through second stage and be referred to committee so that we can look at how we can enhance the bill even further, for example, by bringing forward the appeal process.

I want to thank the member for Dufferin—Caledon for bringing this bill forward and highlighting the issues of parents and grandparents and the need for parliamentarians to put their minds to making the process better for Canadians to reunite with their loved ones.

Finally, on the piece around extending the period from two years to five years, that is a welcome change. Ultimately, I would like to see long-term change so that people can reunite with their loved ones permanently in Canada. In the meantime, these are the measures I can certainly support.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this important issue today.

• (1805)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my absolute pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill C-242. I want to thank my hon. colleague from Dufferin—Caledon for bringing forward this bill and addressing a very important issue for many families and ethnic communities all across Canada.

This is a very practical and compassionate bill that many have talked about and many people have emailed and called about. Again, I want to thank my colleague from Dufferin—Caledon for bringing this bill forward.

The previous Conservative government brought in the super visa to offer parents and grandparents the opportunity to visit their family on an extended basis. It was a way for families to reunite faster than going through the bureaucratic process of family sponsorship. This is a challenge that many Canadians with family abroad unfortunately face today. As the Liberal-made backlog continues to grow, family sponsorship is less of an option.

Family is very important to all of us. I especially feel that in my own community. That is why I am happy to see that these proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to expand access to super visas for families looking to finally come to Canada and see their loved ones.

Family reunification is a concern I hear a lot about in my office, but unfortunately, as the Liberal-made backlog continues to grow, family sponsorship is taking forever. As a result, many grandparents and parents miss out on the milestone moments in their grand-

children's and children's lives. There are missed births, graduations, weddings, first steps. Many milestones get missed, all because of the Liberal-made backlog in immigration.

In my riding, many permanent residents and new Canadians have been waiting, even before the pandemic, to see their families come to Canada. Their family sponsorship cases are caught up in the backlog and they have not received any idea as to when their family members will finally get a decision for their applications.

Mental health is also hit by family separation. All of us experienced the pressure that COVID put on our mental well-being. So many families were stuck waiting for their parents and grandparents as IRCC made excuses about why they could not process those cases. As suicide and addiction rates continue to rise, the effects of family separation and backlogs need to be addressed.

Over the past couple of years, we have all felt the impact of the pandemic and being cut off from travel with our loved ones. As provinces begin to open up and international travel gets easier, re-connecting with family will be very important, especially for Canadians and permanent residents who have parents and grandparents abroad.

The super visa pathway is an opportunity to get past the Liberal-made backlog, help people get to a better place mentally and not miss the important moments in life. That is why the amount of time that a person's super visa is valid should be extended to five years.

Extending the length of time a family can spend together with a super visa has become important for another reason: affordability. This remains a problem for everyone in Canada. As inflation rises, it becomes more challenging to travel to Canada, to visit and to stay here.

My office hears about the cost of health insurance for people on temporary visas and super visas. As the law stands now, temporary residents can only purchase Canadian health insurance, and super visa applicants are required to have it before entering Canada. Unfortunately, this insurance is not always accessible or affordable for people who live abroad. In today's era of technology and high-speed communication, allowing for affordable foreign options for health insurance makes sense for parents and grandparents coming to visit their loved ones in Canada.

Another point I want to raise on the issue of affordability is that super visas are important for providing child care. We all know that grandparents and parents are the best babysitters, and no day care can beat that. Canadians and permanent residents who do not have family here can benefit from having their parents and grandparents close to them. Super visas are a great way to bring family from abroad to support working parents. Giving families that flexibility is also good for economic growth in Canada. It allows parents to work and contribute to the economy.

With this historic backlog at IRCC, one stream that has taken a hit is the caregiver program. Constituents and people across the country are contacting my office, upset with the lack of access to newcomers coming through the caregiver program and how long it takes for anyone to have their application processed. The backlog for this immigration stream, as of February 1, was 16,085 people. That is up from 12,539 people in December.

These are not just applications or numbers. These are families, families that are hurt by this backlog, that need to be reunited to help their mental health as well.

● (1810)

By extending the super visa to five years and making it more accessible, parents and grandparents abroad can come and help fill the demand for at-home child caregivers by supporting their own families.

Bill C-242 also asks the minister to study the minimum income levels currently required for applicants to come to Canada under the super visa. The reality is that we know parents and grandparents living with their family are not a burden on our economy or our country. They help grow it, as families spend more on groceries and family activities, and working parents can go to work knowing their kids are in good hands.

The minimum income levels are an issue today, as inflation and supply chain issues affect the cost of groceries and other essentials such as gas and electricity. While “Justinflation” is hitting people’s pocketbooks hard, now is an excellent time to show compassion and review the minimum income requirement. It was often those workers here in Canada who were in health care, transportation and processing plants who were hit the hardest when it came to COVID. It would have been a great tool for them to have their parents or grandparents here to support them at home, mentally, with their kids or whenever they were going through a tough time. This new bill is very practical, and it would help Canadians in all facets.

The super visa can also be a pathway for those people fleeing the violence caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Looking at the special immigration measures the IRCC has for Ukraine, I see an approach that could leave many people in limbo. The unprovoked attack by Russia has left over a million Ukrainian people displaced. The United Nations estimates roughly 500,000 people have gone to neighbouring countries for safety. Canada cannot let the chaos and lack of communication that led to the failure of the Afghanistan evacuation be repeated in Ukraine.

As our European and NATO allies take in Ukrainians, many people want to come here. Our country has a strong and long-standing connection with the people of Ukraine. Over a million Canadians

are of Ukrainian heritage and thousands still have family there. By making the super visa more accessible and affordable for parents and grandparents fleeing the violence, Canada could do its part to get friends and family out of harm’s way.

This bill shows how needed reforms are for Canada’s immigration system. In the 21st century, our system needs to be smart, compassionate and efficient. Newcomers and their families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, not as a number that can be left in the backlog the Liberal government created. I hope that all of my colleagues here in the House can see the importance of making these changes to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

This is an opportunity to provide a more accessible and affordable pathway for parents and grandparents looking to reunite with their loved ones here in Canada. Again, I want to thank my friend and colleague, the member for Dufferin—Caledon, for bringing this bill forward. I urge all members to support Bill C-242.

* * *

● (1815)

POINTS OF ORDER

USE OF PRIME MINISTER’S NAME

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The member for Calgary Forest Lawn used a term the Conservatives came up with a while ago referencing inflation. Although I know they have been using the term repeatedly, and we thought they were going to stop using it, they continue to do so.

We know one procedural rule is that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly, and it is very clear that, when they use that term to reference inflation, they are invoking the Prime Minister’s first name. As such, I would encourage you to take the opportunity, perhaps, to go back, reflect and come back with a ruling on whether using a term like that does indeed violate the procedural rules we have.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the member for the information he has provided in his point of order. We will certainly take it under consideration and come back to the House, if need be.

*Adjournment Proceedings***REUNITING FAMILIES ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (temporary resident visas for parents and grandparents), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-242. The process of introducing private members' legislation in the House is very important. It is an opportunity for individual members to bring forward ideas and concepts that they feel are important to put before the 338 members of Parliament, and I applaud the member for bringing forward something he is quite passionate about.

I will say right off the bat that I take great exception to some of what I heard, especially in the last speech by the Conservative member. I recognize that the member who introduced this bill was around during the Stephen Harper government and is fully aware of what was going on at the time. I respect the fact that he tried to stray from referring too much to those days, but the member for Calgary Forest Lawn made a number of outrageous claims, in my opinion, one of which was about a Liberal-made backlog. This is coming from the Conservative Party that previously said the family reunification application system was a six-year wait. Why was that? It was—

• (1820)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that there are no questions and comments and there should be no heckling. I would ask them to listen to what the hon. member says in case some of their colleagues want to speak on this and maybe talk in their speeches about some of what they have heard.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Indeed, Madam Speaker, I have been listening very attentively to what they have said, and that is why my comments today are a reflection of what I heard, not something I had written before I came into the chamber, because that is an important part of the debate process.

The member for Calgary Forest Lawn said it was a Liberal-made backlog. This is coming from a member who sits with the party of a former Conservative government that literally had a six-year backlog as it related to family reunification. Why was there such a huge backlog? It was very clear to Canadians at the time that the Stephen Harper government was more interested in immigration applications from people who were bringing what Conservatives perceived to be economic potential into the country. There was a much shorter time period to wait for immigration applications for those coming here to work versus those coming here for the purposes of family reunification.

Although I am very pleased to see members of the Conservative Party now talking about the importance of family reunification, because it is indeed a very important part of the immigration process, I do not agree with the member's comments that this was a Liberal-made backlog, particularly in today's context. Earlier we heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the

House of Commons say that back in the Stephen Harper days, 5,000 applicants were allowed to apply for family reunification in Canada per year, and now we are in the neighbourhood of around 25,000 or 30,000 per year. It is disingenuous to suggest that this government has not been doing its job.

I also found it very interesting when the member for Calgary Forest Lawn said that Conservatives see seniors and children as being a positive to our economic potential. That clearly did not come through in the previous programs that previous Conservative governments had. They took a position, as I mentioned, to move away from family reunification and more in the direction of those who had jobs lined up in Canada and were coming here for economic purposes. Again I am very pleased to see this new position that is being taken by Conservatives. I think it is great and I think it is the right thing; I just do not think that they can stand on firm ground when they talk about this government somehow failing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have five and a half minutes the next time this matter is before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

* * *

• (1825)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, on December 9, 2021, I posed a question to the government seeking clarification as to what support Canada was providing our democratic ally Taiwan, in the face of escalating tension in the Taiwan Strait and increased aggression on the part of the Chinese Communist regime. Disappointingly, the response from the minister was wanting. While it is understandable that in the last several days much attention has shifted to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the provocative actions of the Chinese Communist regime must not be ignored. They pose a real threat, not only to democratic Taiwan but to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the international rules-based order.

Since June of 2020, Chinese military planes, including fighter jets and bombers, have entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone on an almost daily basis. Last October, we saw an unprecedented 150 Chinese military planes enter the air defence identification zone within the span of four days. Those incursions continue to this day. They are part of a broader grey zone assault by the Chinese Communist regime against Taiwan that consists of infiltration, cyber-attacks, the spreading of disinformation and military intimidation.

In the face of this aggression, several of our democratic allies have signalled their strong support for Taiwan. For example, late last year, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken said that any attempt by China to invade Taiwan would be met with serious consequences. Just yesterday, a high-level U.S. delegation consisting of security and defence officials arrived in Taipei to reaffirm the U.S.'s steadfast support for Taiwan and Taiwan's security.

Last February, a month ago, the U.K. House of Commons passed a unanimous motion that, among other things, called for a deepening of security co-operation between Taiwan and the United Kingdom. Our allies, Australia and Japan, have also been clear in their support for Taiwan. By contrast, the government's response has been largely one of silence. It is as if the government refuses to acknowledge the increased Chinese aggression in the Taiwan Strait.

I put it to the government: When will the government step up, join our allies and unequivocally state our support for Taiwan in the face of Chinese Communist aggression?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me begin by assuring the House, including the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, that Canada is deeply concerned about recent tensions in the Taiwan Strait. This issue is important to Canada and to Canadians, especially given the extensive economic, cultural and people-to-people ties that we have had since 1970 with Taiwan, even within the one China policy. Under this policy, Canada recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government of China, taking note of, and neither challenging nor endorsing, the Chinese government's position on Taiwan. This framework has, however, allowed Canada to advance unofficial but very valuable ties with Taiwan based on complementary interests and our shared values.

There are currently some 60,000 Canadians living in Taiwan, which makes it home to the fourth-largest Canadian diaspora community in the world. We have daily non-stop flights between Canada and Taipei and have had those since 2017. With two-way merchandise trade valued at some \$7.4 billion in 2020, Taiwan is Canada's 15th-largest trading partner and a critical member of global supply chains, particularly for chip manufacturing and international shipping.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan was among the first to donate masks to Canada, a sign of our deep and enduring friendship. On issues ranging from global health to civil aviation, Canada has consistently supported Taiwan's meaningful participation in global discussions where it is useful and where Taiwan's absence would be detrimental to global interests. Despite international efforts to promote greater inclusion in international organizations, such as the World Health Assembly and the International Civil Aviation Organization, Taiwan remains shut out of important discussions where its presence would benefit all of us.

In recent years, we have observed increased incursions into Taiwan's self-declared air defence identification zone by the People's Liberation Army. Canada is very concerned about these actions and incidents that could result in further escalations across the Taiwan Strait. Canadian officials have communicated directly to Chinese authorities our concerns about destabilizing military actions across the strait. We are doing so practically as well by taking part in oper-

ations in the region, most recently through the involvement of Canada's frigate HMCS *Winnipeg*. We are there, we are communicating strongly and we want to ensure that Taiwan is secure in its region. That is very important to Canada. We will continue to monitor the cross-strait developments closely while reiterating our strong support for constructive efforts that contribute to peace, stability and dialogue in the region.

As a progressive democracy, Taiwan demonstrates that Confucian values and individual rights and freedoms, including for women, the LGBTQ community and indigenous peoples, can coexist. Canada has many other unique reasons to advance its ties with Taiwan without reference to the agenda of third parties. This long-standing approach has guided Canada's engagement with Taiwan for over five decades and will remain a cornerstone of our continued engagement in the future.

● (1830)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I share the hon. parliamentary secretary's sentiments and I concur with him that Taiwan is an important ally to Canada in terms of our trade, our people-to-people links and our shared values. That is why the government's inaction to strongly signal its support for Taiwan in the face of Chinese communist aggression has been so disappointing. In that regard, Canada has fallen short of our allies. There are meaningful things that Canada can be doing.

Canada could, for example, establish meaningful security co-operation with Taiwan. We could be a leader in encouraging Taiwan's participation in multilateral military exercises. Unlike the government, which did not signal its support, we should be signalling our support for Taiwan's inclusion in the CPTPP. Those are three practical measures that could be taken. It is time the government began to act.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I would assert again to the House that Canada remains committed to advancing our interests and those of Taiwan within the framework of Canada's one China policy. Our engagement with Taiwan is multi-faceted and has on its own merits an important role to play in advancing Canadian interests. Those are as important as the very concerning things the member raised regarding the cross-strait security question.

As our sixth-largest trading partner in the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan and its economic stability matter to Canadians, to Canadian businesses and to Canadian exporters. For instance, recognizing Taiwan's crucial position in global supply chains, Canada recently launched exploratory discussions on a possible foreign investment promotion and protection arrangement with Taiwan. We will continue to advance Canadian interests and establish security in the region.

Adjournment Proceedings

HEALTH

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the adjournment proceedings tonight.

I will start with a candid comment that I have said to several constituents over the course of the last few weeks when we have debated the many issues facing the city of Ottawa specifically and our country: I cannot wait until we can come to the floor of the House of Commons and not talk about COVID or convoys. However, I want to follow up on the supplemental question I asked in question period a few weeks ago about a reopening plan from this government.

As I said before, this should be a happy time for our country. We are seeing a drop in severity with the latest COVID-19 variant, and we have seen the surge begin to eliminate itself. We have seen public health data and public health experts say that we are now in a phase of this pandemic, thankfully, where we do not have to live in fear and where we can learn to live with COVID and adjust our public health measures to do so.

A few weeks ago in our opposition day motion, we simply asked for a plan. The motion was voted down by the government and the NDP, not because of science but because of politics. It was reasonable at this point in the game, and it was not unrealistic. Several provinces, provincial premiers and leaders around the world in similar situations to what Canada has faced during this pandemic have given their citizens hope to say that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, here is the plan, here are the metrics, here are the benchmarks to know that we are finally getting to the end of this pandemic, and here is when we can see some closure and some advancement on getting back to normal.

I had to laugh because the motion was voted down and two days later an NDP member stood up in question period and said, “We need a plan”. The NDP just voted against it three days before. Nevertheless, we are still here, unfortunately, in a situation where, yes, things have certainly been tense in our country over the past few weeks and months.

A lot of my constituents say, and rightly so, that there is a difference between the federal restrictions and measures that have been put in place and the provincial ones. A lot of provincial premiers and leaders have shown plans and timelines and made progress, but at the federal level we do not see that same leadership. We have asked the government numerous times to provide the science and data that shows the reason for mandates and some of the measures it is responsible for, but these things are still in place and we have gotten silence back.

However, others are speaking up in this country. I think of the many border communities in the province of Ontario, where home is to me, such as the city of Cornwall, the port of entry there and SD&G. Local mayors and tourism businesses are wanting to see the restrictive measures at land borders finally and rightfully lifted. There have been leaders as well. For example, I will quote an article where Mayor Drew Dilkens from the City of Windsor said this:

“So I think what we need to do is trust Canadians to make smart decisions. We’ve asked people to get vaccinated, that is the high water mark here of the pan-

demic. But having a requirement for a test is really an optical illusion for safety. It really is providing no real protection.”

Dilkens and his counterparts said the science doesn't support testing of this kind and it remains a barrier for those looking to cross land borders between the U.S. and Canada.

We also still have on the table from the government the idea of an interprovincial mandate for truck drivers, which would be extremely inappropriate considering the data, public health advice and the direction of provincial leaders and many countries around the world.

My supplemental question to the government is this: What are the metrics? What are the time frames? Where is the hope to get back to a semblance of normalcy and to get back to normal?

Canadians have been more than patient. They have done their part. There is no reason why at this point in the game they cannot have a detailed plan.

● (1835)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member, although the question he asked me was not the question that I was given to respond to. Just before I do respond with the speech that I was given, I would just say that COVID is not listening to Parliament. COVID is not listening to politicians.

We talk about providing a plan. Two years ago, almost to the day, we were hit with a pandemic that none of us ever expected to see. I am very proud of how our government has responded. I was really proud, at the beginning of the pandemic, of how all the parties came together in March 2020. I remember a press conference in which all parties were saying that we needed to pull together. That changed over the months, unfortunately.

I wish that in March 2020, somebody could have said, “Okay, in two weeks time, this is what is going to happen,” but none of us knew. None of us expected it. The member said that the government needs to say what the plan is. We have never been able to say that, because we do not know what the virus is going to do.

I think we have acted responsibly. We have always had the health and safety of Canadians at the heart of every decision we have made. That is the most important thing that we can do. It is important that the opposition work with us. It is important that we work together. We are always open to hearing constructive ideas from the opposition, from all parties in the House and from all members of the House as to the best way forward.

I do not know how much time I have left, but I was of the understanding that the question was going to be about the implementation of the Emergencies Act. I would like to just touch on part of that, only because I think it is important to highlight the importance of our national unity and the leadership of the government. Canadians are looking for the country to come together. They are looking for all of us to listen to each other in a respectful way. Over the last few months, we seem to have lost the ability to disagree agreeably.

I do not say that about the hon. member, who in my experience has always had the ability to disagree agreeably, and I appreciate that. I know that our government appreciates those who come to these really difficult issues in ways that are constructive. Unfortunately, the rhetoric and the misinformation created, in our peaceful country, peaceful protests that turned into an occupation. That turned into convoys that were blocking trade in my community of Oakville North—Burlington. We saw Ford of Canada with layoffs.

We moved away from having those dialogues. The conversation is important, but it is unrealistic to say that we could present a plan for something that would not be listening to anything we said.

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am not sure which matter was being brought before the House, because I do not have that in front of me at this point. Someone may have gotten the notice wrong. I will allow the hon. member to have his last minute and the hon. parliamentary secretary will be able to respond.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Speaker, I apologize for any hiccups, but it was relatively relevant to the topic. The Emergencies Act is an example of something that we were confronted with as Parliament in the past few weeks.

I will just say this to my hon. colleague. We are now into year three of the pandemic. The light at the end of the tunnel is here. It is not politicians that are saying that out of turn. We are hearing more public health leaders and experts saying this. We are at a time when we could start to end federal mandates. People could start to get back to work and get their livelihoods back, and do so safely. We could have federal public service workers return to downtown Ottawa to get our economy going again in the city of Ottawa and in eastern Ontario. We are at a spot now where we could rule out the need for interprovincial truck mandates. We could look for travel and tourism at our land borders, which is very important to the city of Cornwall in my region.

I would just say, for travel and tourism, time is of the essence. A plan, metrics, and light, hope and optimism are needed for the many people who rely on American visitors coming up and using our land borders each year.

I would encourage the government, once again, to please get a plan, get back open, end mandates and get back to normal.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more that we need optimism and we need hope. I would say that in the fall we all were feeling that. I know I renewed my season's tickets to my favourite lacrosse team. I had gone to a game. It felt like we were moving out of it, and I do not think any of us here expected the

devastation that omicron brought and the challenges that our health care system had.

Most of these mandates that people are frustrated with are actually put in place by the provincial governments, so when we were faced with something that none of us expected back in the fall, government had to react to it.

I agree that we need to be hopeful. I agree that we need to be optimistic and I know that all of us want to return to the “before” times, but, with all due respect, I will go back to what I said before: COVID is not listening to us. We do not know what kind of thing is going to happen in the future. We need to be nimble. We need to be able to react to that.

I thank the hon. member for his constructive comments.

COVID-19 ECONOMIC MEASURES

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Madam Speaker, it has been nearly a month since I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage whether he would consider hosting a national conference on the future of art. Since then, performing artists have continued to reach out to me about how their livelihoods are imperilled. The arts community is an integral part of our economy, and while the additional funding by the government via the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund was a positive step for sector resilience, we are far from the end of the crisis. This is why I called on the minister to convene a national conference on the future of art, because it is clear that we have to find a way to live with COVID. It is clear also that every industry is different and that we must develop a targeted approach to how we will support different sectors and how we will support the arts community.

I will give an example. When the Province of Ontario initiated a lockdown in response to the omicron variant, the arts were lumped into the same bucket as sports arenas. It did not matter that when we were watching *Come From Away* or when I went to see *The Nutcracker*, I and other audience members were doing so quietly and we were masked. It did not matter that this was an experience vastly different from that of the Scotiabank Arena, where audiences are eating and drinking and cheering for the Raptors and the Leafs.

Let me be clear. I know that everyone here will appreciate that this fell within provincial jurisdiction. However, it is federally, not just in funding but also in leading and in convening, that the government can take action because, unfortunately, the decimation to the arts community is sadly not just exclusively in my riding and not just in Ontario but all across Canada. This is why Canada needs, and again I reiterate my call for it, a national conference to forge the path forward on the future of art in our country.

Adjournment Proceedings

Like my hon. colleague, I have been at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, where we have heard from many witnesses about the need for this because of the crippling impact that COVID has had on their sector. In fact, quite a number of the witnesses whom the heritage committee has heard from were from my riding of Spadina—Fort York, such as Ms. Kendra Bator of Mirvish Productions and Ms. Barbara Diabo, chair of the grand council of the Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, to name but a couple. The statements provided by them and other witnesses were startling.

The cost that COVID has levied on the Canadian arts community is alarming, and we must act, because the cost of inaction is not just on Canadian art and culture, which I would suggest is priceless; the price of inaction will mean jobs lost, local businesses continuing to be devastated, and forgone tax revenue.

Let me share some of the stats that Kendra from Mirvish, which is our country's largest theatre production company, shared with the heritage committee. In 2019, over 1.8 million people attended a commercial theatre production. On tickets alone, audiences spent over \$160 million, generating over \$19 million in tax revenue. This does not even include a billion dollars spent on additional travel, hotels, restaurants, parking and retail.

When people support the arts community, they are also supporting Canadian small businesses. When they support the arts community, they are also supporting Canadian tourism. When they support the arts community, they are supporting Canadian jobs and culture.

Does my hon. colleague not agree that we have to take action and that the government must convene a national conference on the future of art?

• (1845)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his suggestion, but he is late to the game. This is something the minister has committed to. Unfortunately, due to the omicron wave, the summit for artists and creators has been delayed, but it is something we are committed to moving forward on.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, our government has engaged with both organizations and individuals who work in the cultural sector and acted upon their concerns through both universal measures that were broadly available to Canadians and unprecedented investments in new and existing programs specific to the cultural sector.

We have made every effort to mitigate the financial hardships experienced by organizations, performers, artists and technicians whose employment has been interrupted by the pandemic. We were there in the spring of 2020 with the emergency support fund for culture, heritage and sport organizations to blunt the initial impact of the pandemic. Our 2020 fall economic statement committed \$181.5 million to support the planning and presentation of COVID-19 safe events and performances, as well as to provide work opportunities, including a dedicated \$40-million envelope for the support for workers in live arts and music sectors fund in fiscal year 2021-22.

Budget 2021 included an investment of \$500 million over two years for the recovery fund for arts, culture, heritage and sport sec-

tors, and the reopening fund. Substantial portions of budget 2021 funds are being invested in the live arts presentation sector, community festivals, performing arts organizations and music. Our government has modified our programs to make them more responsive to changing conditions on the ground, and we did that most recently with the expansion of the Canada worker lockdown benefit announced in December.

We know that the capacity reductions, cancellations and closures across the country, which were necessary to protect public health, have been devastating for workers in the live performance sector, particularly self-employed gig workers. This is why we announced an investment of \$60 million in the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund for 2022-23.

This new temporary program has been launched and will support sector-delivered initiatives that improve the economic, career and personal situations of independent and self-employed workers in the live performance sector. These initiatives can include direct financial support to these workers for emergency or hardship relief, as well as programs and services that provide career transition advice, counselling services, skills enhancement or professional development activities.

Throughout the pandemic, direct engagement with the arts and culture sectors has been essential to delivering a robust and relevant response. We remain committed to holding a national summit on plans to restart and position the arts, culture and heritage sectors for the future. This event has been under development, but, as I mentioned, it has been postponed until public health restrictions allow for face-to-face meetings to take place safely.

The department is finalizing plans and dates for this event in light of evolving public health conditions. The summit will be held in person as soon it is safe to do so, with a continuing focus on post-COVID recovery and the long-term competitiveness of Canada's arts, culture and heritage sectors. The arts and culture are vital to our economy and to the quality of our lives. We will continue to support artists, cultural workers and their sectors through the challenges they currently face.

• (1850)

Mr. Kevin Vuong: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague said that I am late to the game. The province is starting to open up. When is this national convening going to happen? The inaction by the government has led to us losing Canada's most successful musical, *Come From Away*. In our hometown of Toronto, it has closed.

Adjournment Proceedings

I want to localize the impact this has had due to inaction. *Come From Away* attracted more than a million patrons to Toronto. Box office sales surpassed \$115 million with \$15 million in HST. The show created jobs over 9,000 employee weeks. This was for the cast, stage managers, musicians, crew members and front of the house team members.

When will the national convening happen?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, the hon. member sounds like what we hear from the Conservative Party saying that he wills COVID to be over and we should pick a date. That is not how this pandemic is happening. I know he attended a couple of heritage committee meetings and believes that he is an expert on the subject, but the reality of the situation is that COVID is real and COVID is there.

We have been there at every step of the way to support our cultural workers. We will continue to do so. There is no need to set a date. We know it is pressing. As soon as it is possible to do so, we will host the summit. It is a priority for this government.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is 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 6:54 p.m.)

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