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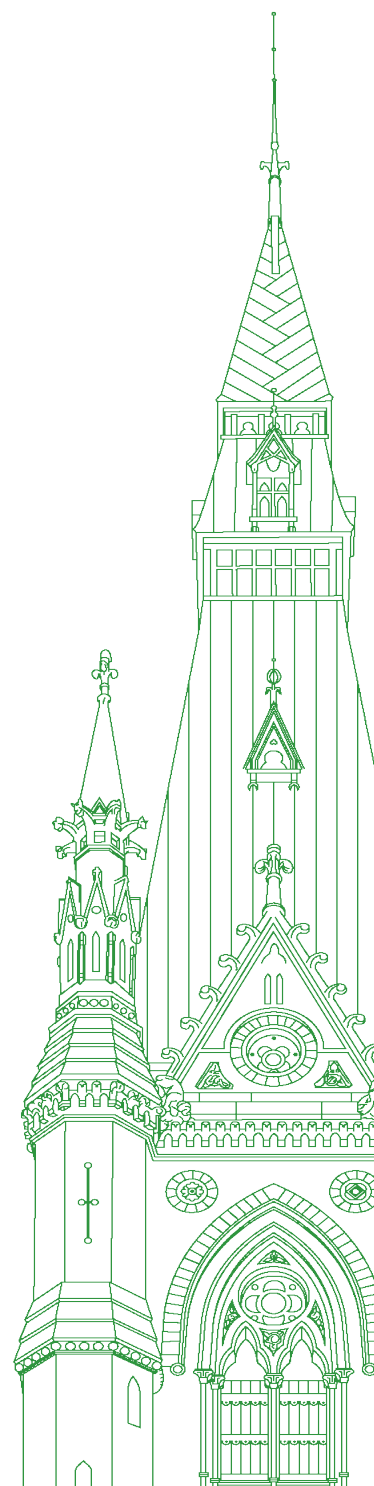
House of Commons Debates

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 7, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to the motion adopted on Tuesday, March 29, 2022, regarding the request for a government response to the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, entitled “The Shadow Pandemic: Stopping Coercive and Controlling Behaviour in Intimate Relationships,” which was presented to the House of Commons on Tuesday, April 27, 2021, during the second session of the 43rd Parliament.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House always, and today I would like to present a petition in regard to the support of Bill S-223. This is a Senate bill that is aimed at combatting forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for an individual to travel overseas to receive an organ taken from an individual without that person giving consent.

It has also been brought to my attention that, through this petition as I table it, we can honour a former MP, Mr. David Kilgour, who passed away this past week on Tuesday. Mr. Kilgour was one of two Canadians who initially made the world aware of organ harvesting and trafficking in China. He played a key role in passing legislation to combat it in other countries as well. It is an honour to present this petition in honour of him.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I too am going to rise to table a petition in support of the Senate bill, Bill S-223, which seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking, and make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad to receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

I too would like to take this opportunity to recognize the amazing work that was done by the late member of Parliament, David Kilgour, on this. David was actually a member of Parliament when I first started university in Edmonton. He was a very kind man and he did so much, so I just wanted to take this opportunity, in his honour, to put forward this petition on the work that he had spent so much of his life doing.

• (1005)

INDIA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually have two petitions. They are both of the same nature, so I will combine the two of them as one.

When things occur in countries abroad, often community members here in Canada will respond. For example, when India passed legislation related to farmers in India, particularly in Punjab, many of my constituents took great exception to the new laws and actually submitted and signed off on a petition asking the Government of Canada to be aware and to do what it could. It was really quite encouraging to see that there have been some changes, which no doubt will make my constituents a little happier, and I wanted to table these petitions today.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition this morning from 263 Canadians who are calling on Parliamentarians to do everything that they can to prevent the Liberals from fulfilling one of their objectives, that of revoking the charitable status of crisis pregnancy centres.

The petitioners point out so adequately that crisis pregnancy centres do so much more than just counsel women who find themselves in an unwanted pregnancy situation to keep their babies. They also provide the necessary supports for mothers who choose to make the difficult decision to keep their child. They provide support for these individuals. The petitioners want Parliament to recognize that and to not allow the Liberals to revoke charitable status for these very essential crisis pregnancy centres.

Routine Proceedings

VACCINE MANDATES

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in order to put forward a petition from constituents in my riding who are calling on the government to lift all mandates with regard to COVID vaccinations in order to travel, in order to be able to cross the border and then come back, and in order to be able to enter into federally regulated workplaces, etc.

This group also highlights the fact that the mandates have been politicized, and they call on the Prime Minister to stop such comments as “racist” or “misogynist” being associated with those individuals who might think differently from him.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTING AND SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to table a petition on behalf of volunteer firefighters from Ucluelet to Tofino, Beaver Creek, Sproat Lake and Cherry Creek in my riding. It is timely, because it is budget day.

The International Association of Fire Fighters cites that volunteer firefighters account for 83% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders. In addition, approximately 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers respond to thousands of incidents each year.

The tax code currently allows volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers to claim a \$3,000 tax credit if 200 hours of volunteer services were completed in a calendar year. This works out to a mere \$450 per year that we allow these volunteers to keep of their own income. The petitioners cite that increasing this tax credit to \$10,000 would allow these essential volunteers to keep more of their hard-earned money, which is likely to be spent in the communities they live in, and would help retain these volunteers at a time when volunteerism is decreasing.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada and Parliament to support the private member's bill, Bill C-201, to increase this credit from \$3,000 to \$10,000.

UKRAINE

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of petitioners from Saskatoon West.

This petition is in regard to the unprovoked war on the people of Ukraine. Of course, we know that the war has triggered a human rights, humanitarian and displacement crisis, and the petitioners are calling for the implementation of visa-free travel.

In my riding and in Saskatchewan there is a large contingent of people of Ukrainian descent, and this is very important to them. They note that a public poll done on March 9 showed that 85% of Canadians support the idea of visa-free travel for Ukrainians to Canada. The petitioners call on Canada to immediately waive all of these requirements and grant visa-free travel to Ukrainians.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to present a petition and to raise the concerns of many Canadians, and many throughout the world, related to the atrocious practice of human organ harvesting.

This petition is in support of Bill S-223. This is a Senate bill that seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. The bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad to receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

As I table this petition, I also want to give honour to former MP David Kilgour who passed away on Tuesday. I recall that Mr. Kilgour was also a member of the parliamentary prayer breakfast group that would gather regularly, and his contributions were always meaningful and significant. I would like to give honour to Mr. Kilgour and his memory today and express our deepest and heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. He was very instrumental in helping to blow the whistle initially on forced organ harvesting and trafficking in China and played a key role in this legislation to combat it in other countries. I am sorry that he will not be able to see this take place in person, but somehow I have a feeling that he will be aware of the bill's passage when it does happen.

• (1010)

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too rise to present a petition on Bill S-223. We all know now that it is to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking, making it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without the consent of the person giving the organ.

Certainly, as a former family physician this bill would strike to the heart of the matter for me. We all know that this is vastly inappropriate and sadly a burgeoning event happening in countries to people who are not quite so lucky as to be Canadian.

Again, I would like to honour a colleague, who is not a colleague of mine but of everybody else here it appears, David Kilgour, a great champion not only of this issue but of other human rights issues.

OPIOIDS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my honour today to stand on behalf of hundreds of Canadians who have called on the government to deal with the opioid crisis in Canada. The opioid crisis is one of the most deadly public health crisis emergencies of our lifetime. In Alberta, there was a 229% increase in the number of deaths that occurred between January 2020 and January 2021.

The people who have signed this petition ask that steps are taken to end overdose deaths and overdose injuries, to collaborate with provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian overdose action plan, and to ensure that any plan considers reforms that other countries have used, such as legal regulation of drugs to ensure adequate safe supply.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition in support of Bill S-223. This is the bill to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking. It would make it a criminal offence for a Canadian to go abroad to receive an organ taken without the consent of the donor.

This horrific practice was first brought to light by former member of Parliament, David Kilgour, who sadly passed away just this past week. It is a shame that he did not live to see its passage, but I certainly hope that this bill will pass. I did have the privilege of meeting Mr. Kilgour and talking about his incredible work in exposing this murderous practice that sadly goes on.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am also tabling a petition on Bill S-223, which seeks to fight the really unjust, unfair practice of organ harvesting that is being done in different parts of the world and to make it a criminal offence to go abroad to receive an organ without the consent of the donor.

Again, like other members have done, I am just going to rise also to recognize David Kilgour, his family and his wife. I knew David decently well. We exchanged emails and met off and on. He is the one who blew the doors open on this practice overseas and made this thing possible. He passed away on Tuesday. God bless him for his work and God bless him for everything he did for this Parliament.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too rise today to present a petition in support of Bill S-223. This is not the first Parliament in which this bill has been introduced and received widespread support.

I would also like to note and honour former member of Parliament, David Kilgour, a principled member of Parliament from this place, who stood strong for the values of human rights both in Canada and around the world. I am sure petitioners want to see this bill finally passed and given royal assent in this country after having been discussed and debated in three Parliaments. I hope that we can do so in honour of Mr. Kilgour, who championed this and, as has been noted, blew the doors open and was a whistle-blower on this deplorable practice around the world.

I am proud to stand along with many of my colleagues and present this petition here today to see that Bill S-223 gets passed for all of the victims but also in honour of Mr. Kilgour.

• (1015)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am also going to table a petition on Bill S-223.

I join colleagues on all sides of the House in recognizing the incredible legacy of David Kilgour, who passed away this week. David brought this issue to my attention and to many people's attention. He, along with David Matas, wrote the initial report on this issue. He has been a tireless champion on it and on so many other human rights issues as well.

I am very pleased to table this petition in support of Bill S-223 and, in the process, recognize Mr. Kilgour's work on this and so many other important human rights issues.

Routine Proceedings

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I will table is on another issue that David Kilgour worked on. It is on the Uighur genocide.

The petitioners highlight the horrific human rights abuses that have happened to Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China. The petitioners want the government to formally recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are being subject to genocide and to use the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, to sanction those who are responsible for heinous crimes being committed against Uighurs.

POLITICAL BELIEF

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I will table is in support of Bill C-257. It is my private member's bill seeking to combat political discrimination, people being discriminated against on the basis of their political beliefs and opinions. It would add political beliefs and activities on the prohibited grounds of discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The petitioners want the government to support Bill C-257 and defend the rights of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my last petition is to highlight the situation in Ethiopia. The petitioners are concerned about human rights in Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray region, and ask the government to take further action in response to that, be actively engaged, call for independent investigations and end all human rights violations.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***PRESERVING PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ACT**

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.) moved that Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (electoral representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, obviously, I would have liked to have been in the House today in person, but, like many Canadians, I am recovering from a COVID infection, so I am participating virtually from New Brunswick.

I am pleased to speak in the House today to begin the debate at second reading of Bill C-14. Following the decennial census, the Chief Electoral Officer calculates the number of House of Commons seats allocated to each province using the formula specified in Canada's Constitution. This is important to all of us, and I know that I speak for all colleagues when I say that serving as a member of Parliament representing one's constituency in the House of Commons is an immense honour.

As members of Parliament, our job is to serve our constituents. This means listening to their ideas, proposals and concerns, reconciling often opposing viewpoints, navigating challenges and working together to advance the interests of Canadians.

• (1020)

[Translation]

Representation in the House of Commons, and the readjustment of that representation over the years, is particularly important to us because it is the crux of our democratic system.

Although the fathers of Confederation established a representation formula for the House of Commons based on the principle of representation by population or voter equality, Canada grew over the course of its history. Over time, the formula had to be adjusted based on growth rates and population size, which vary from region to region in our country.

Consequently, and given these population differences and the unique nature of our federation, the principle of modified proportionate representation was established as the guiding principle for representation in the House of Commons.

As a result of the changes made over time, today's representation formula takes into account provinces with faster-growing populations while protecting smaller, slower-growing provinces.

This is an important aspect of our democratic system and our federation. It ensures integrity and transparency through an independent, legislated process that is built on the principle of proportional representation but is sensitive to regional representation issues.

The Canadian Constitution requires that the number of seats in the House of Commons and the electoral boundaries be reviewed every 10 years, after each decennial census. This requirement

makes it possible to accurately reflect changes and movements in the populations of Canada's provinces.

For this calculation, the Chief Electoral Officer uses the representation formula set out in sections 51 and 51A of the Constitution Act, 1867, and Statistics Canada's population estimates.

[English]

We studied all possible options in order to find what we think is the most responsible approach to this process, an approach where no province would have fewer seats than it did in 2021. The seat allocation formula would keep all protections in place and would continue to permit incremental seat increases in provinces such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia due to their growing provincial populations. This updated clause would ensure all provinces continue to have a strong voice in our House of Commons.

Under our government's proposal, the calculation and objectives of the seat allocation formula remain the same. Smaller and slower growing provinces would be protected and provinces with growing populations would continue to see incremental gains. The government's proposed amendment to introduce what can colloquially be known as the 2021 grandfather clause is a considered measure. It would ensure no province would have fewer seats than it did during the 43rd Parliament.

The 2021 grandfather amendment applies to all provinces and creates a new floor for them, should their populations experience a significant shift over time. This is, in a small but impactful way, a significant amendment. Again, I would point out that the seat allocation formula remains exactly the same, keeping other protections in place as well. Furthermore, the proposal continues to permit incremental seat growth in provinces, as I mentioned, due to their growing provincial populations.

I would like to take a moment to remind colleagues of how the formula works and will continue to work. It is a mathematical formula that follows a simple four-step process. The first step in the formula is the initial allocation of seats to the provinces. The electoral quotient is obtained by multiplying the quotient of the last decennial redistribution by the average of the population growth rates of the 10 provinces over the last 10 years.

The 2021 electoral quotient, as established by Elections Canada, is 121,891. This number roughly corresponds to the average riding size across the provinces, although as I mentioned earlier, this does vary considerably, based on the unique circumstances of different jurisdictions across the country. The base number of seats is then obtained by dividing the population of each province by this electoral quotient.

Secondly, the application of special clauses follows. After the initial number of seats per provinces is determined, seat adjustments are made to account for the senatorial clause and the grandfather clause, except that, under our government's proposed legislation, this will become the 2021 grandfather clause, but it works exactly the same way.

The senatorial clause guarantees that each province has no fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has in the Senate. That remains in place. That is obviously important for smaller provinces like mine of New Brunswick.

The 2021 grandfather clause guarantees that each province will have no fewer seats than it had in 2021. This is instead of the 1985 grandfather clause passed during the previous Conservative government of Mr. Mulroney. These rules continue to ensure that our smaller provinces and those with perhaps declining populations continue to be heard in the House of Commons.

The third step in the formula includes the application of the representation rule. The representation rule applies to a province whose population was overrepresented in the House of Commons, relative to its share of the national population at the completion of the previous redistribution process. If a province were to lose its overrepresentation in the House of Commons, relative to its share of the national population, then it is given extra seats to ensure it remains overrepresented in the House.

Quebec is the only province that has benefited from this rule in the past. With our government's amendment in place, Quebec would preserve its seat count at 78. With Quebec at 78 seats, its share of seats in the House would remain higher than its share of national population and the representation rule would not apply.

Once the special clauses and the representation rules are applied, the number of seats in each province is then determined. Finally, three seats are allocated to the territories. This is the final step in allocating the total number of seats in the House of Commons.

Once the number of seats in the House of Commons has been determined, then the process of redrawing the electoral boundaries within each province begins, and this year it is no different.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Electoral boundaries are redrawn in each province in accordance with the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. Most importantly, the act establishes independent, non-partisan electoral boundaries commissions to redistribute and adjust federal electoral ridings in Canada.

The act very clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of these commissions as well as the redistribution process and the criteria the commissions must meet. To ensure neutrality, all timelines and activities are predetermined and transparent. In addition, riding redistribution was set on a 10-year cycle to mitigate the possibility of parties adjusting boundaries to obtain a political advantage.

Government Orders

• (1030)

[English]

I would like to make clear that the independence of these commissions is a fundamental element of the electoral boundaries readjustment process. For this reason, the provincial chief justices are responsible for appointing a chairperson for each commission, while the Speaker of the House of Commons, with the advice of Elections Canada, is responsible for independently appointing two other members for each three-person commission in every one of the provinces.

[Translation]

I would like to acknowledge the distinguished Canadians who have agreed to serve as independent commission members tasked with drawing electoral district boundaries and who dedicate much of their time to this important work. Thanks to their expertise, often rooted in academia, law or the public service, they are developing proposals that Canadians and members of Parliament can obviously weigh in on.

Since 2021 was a decennial census year, the redistribution process has already begun. Ten independent, non-partisan electoral boundaries commissions were established by proclamation on November 1 of last year, one for each province. The commissions began their work after the release of the final census data in early February of this year. They are now beginning the process of reviewing the ridings. They will engage in public consultations and decide on changes to constituencies in each province.

[English]

The commissions are guided by a highly prescriptive and legislative process that takes approximately 18 to 20 months to complete. They will work to propose a new electoral map for their province by considering criteria such as average population numbers, communities of identity and interest, historical patterns of an electoral district and the geographic size of electoral districts. The commissions are also required to consult with Canadians through public hearings. At these hearings, members of Parliament and the general public are invited to participate and can make presentations to support or oppose particular proposals by commissions.

[Translation]

Following consultations, the commissions are required to submit a preliminary report on the proposed new electoral boundaries to the Speaker of the House of Commons through the Chief Electoral Officer. This is followed by a parliamentary committee study, during which members once again have the opportunity to express their concerns. Members have 30 days to submit objections in writing to the clerk of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee then considers the objections and submits the final copy of the objections and the minutes of its study to the Speaker of the House. All this information is then provided by the Chief Electoral Officer to the commissions.

Government Orders

Commissions also have to review members' objections and suggestions. However, there is one important detail: Decisions about how boundaries are to be adjusted are the sole responsibility of these independent commissions. The commissions are required to submit a final report to the Chief Electoral Officer along with an electoral map indicating the electoral boundaries in their province. The results of the readjustment process become official once the Governor in Council signs a representation order describing the new electoral districts. However, changes to electoral districts do not become official until the first general election at least seven months after the date of proclamation.

This period gives Elections Canada, political parties, candidates and sitting MPs the time to prepare for the next general election based on these new districts.

[English]

The 2022 redistribution process is in its early stages. Our government's bill minimizes any disruption to the ongoing electoral boundaries readjustment process that I have just described. Only the work of the Quebec electoral boundaries commission would be affected and, importantly, this would not delay any of the work in the other nine provinces. The bill also allows for the Quebec commission to readjust its proposal as needed and take the time required to consider the province's seat allocation should the 2021 grandfather clause be adopted in legislation.

Representation matters. Redistribution matters as well. It matters for all Canadians to feel their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed fairly. It matters that they are represented effectively regardless of where they live in Canada.

• (1035)

[Translation]

The electoral boundaries readjustment process is an important feature of our democratic system. It provides an opportunity to reflect on and appreciate how representation works in our democracy and, more generally, the importance of integrity and transparency as founding principles of our democratic systems and institutions.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister. Truthfully, I am glad he explained how the electoral redistribution in Canada will be carried out with the commissions, because now I do not have to do so in my speech later in the House.

I would like to ask the minister to comment on two rulings handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada. The first ruling, handed down in 1991, deals with provincial electoral boundaries in Saskatchewan. In section 3, on the right to vote, the court stated that effective representation in Canada is more important than the concept of one vote per person.

Could the minister comment on that in the context of this legislation?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Calgary Shepard for his question.

Obviously, I share the member's interest in how the application of these democratic principles has evolved as a result of various

rulings by lower courts, courts of appeal and, ultimately, the Supreme Court of Canada.

Electoral representation in provincial legislatures often differs from that of the House of Commons, for example, because, as our colleagues know full well, we are a federation. As I tried to explain at the beginning of my speech, within this federation, for all kinds of constitutional historical reasons, the system of representation that has been developed reflects certain unique aspects of the various provinces. That is why we now have a system that I believe has served Canadians well over the years.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member who moved this motion if, in his opinion, Quebec's political weight is guaranteed.

I am just saying that Quebec's weight has steadily declined over time, and that decline is likely to accelerate. In 1947, Quebec held 28% of the seats, in 1976, 24.6%, in 1999, 24.9%, and in 2015, it held 23.1%.

Even by maintaining the status quo, if we can call it that—it is not because Quebec's representation, Quebec's political weight, continues to decline—does this bill guarantee our specificity in Quebec and our uniqueness?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville for her question.

I believe that Quebec's political weight is guaranteed by this bill in that we have changed a clause to guarantee the provinces the same number of seats they had in 2021 during the next electoral redistribution.

We have heard several of our colleagues from the Quebec Liberal caucus in the House talk about the importance of preserving the 78 seats in Quebec, and that is exactly what we will do if this bill is passed.

Quebec's political weight is also represented by having, for example, a Prime Minister of Canada who is also an MP from Quebec.

• (1040)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech and for introducing this bill.

I am very pleased to see that one element of the agreement negotiated by our two parties is in this bill. In reading this document, we see that the last line protects Quebec seats. It is good to see this come about quickly.

However, this agreement also included other elements, such as making it easier to vote by providing for a three-day voting period during general elections and easier access to different polling stations.

Why did the minister not include these elements in his bill?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

He is quite right. In the agreement that our government entered into with his party, the NDP, we agreed to maintain the 78 seats Quebec presently has in the House of Commons. That is exactly what this very targeted bill will do.

As for other enhancements that we have agreed to make, I concur with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie on the need to make it easier to vote by increasing the number of voting days or allowing, for example, access to voting on campus.

In my opinion, all these reforms will have to be made in consultation with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and following the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada.

Given that the electoral redistribution process is already under way, we are presenting a targeted and specific bill to respond to the issue of the provinces' demographic weight and provincial representation. We will definitely have the opportunity to work together on other enhancements.

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the minister for his leadership on this file and for his overall leadership over the past many years.

British Columbia has the fastest-growing population. In Surrey, 1,500 people are moving in every month. How would the formula the minister is bringing forward be fair to the people of British Columbia?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, my friend from Surrey—Newton has represented, in a very effective way, the people of Surrey and the people of British Columbia for many years. He raises an essential point that many of our colleagues from British Columbia have discussed with me and with our government: the importance of respecting the formula, as he noted, that adds additional seats to provinces like his, British Columbia, and probably, ultimately, to the Surrey region. We will see what the commission decides in British Columbia.

Nothing in this legislation in any way affects provinces such as his, Alberta and Ontario, which have growing populations, from being allocated additional seats under the formula I outlined. Obviously we look forward to the work of the commission in British Columbia to see how those additional seats will reflect population growth in communities as important to Canada as Surrey.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Brunswick, the minister, for his efforts and work. This is a big task and I appreciate those efforts.

I know the minister has a great appreciation for a province like New Brunswick, where we have a lot of rural communities and small towns. Some redistribution has been going on. I take it that in this process, that redistribution is being considered and factored in, as is ensuring that while the areas that have an increased population have increased representation, we make sure that our rural areas are not neglected and have proper, solid representation as well.

Government Orders

If the minister could speak to that, it would be most appreciated.

• (1045)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac, that great New Brunswick constituency. Like him, I represent a rural part of our province of New Brunswick and I completely share his interest and his concern in terms of the importance of ensuring that smaller communities and rural communities are represented adequately. Our province will benefit from the senatorial clause, which will not see New Brunswick seats fall below 10 in any redistribution. That is constitutionally guaranteed.

The commission in our province of New Brunswick will have a difficult job of ensuring that rural communities like the ones he represents or that I and other colleagues represent have a fair and proper representation in our province, but in the same way that it is happening across the country, some of the urban parts of our province are growing at a rate that does not reflect some of the small rural communities.

This is a difficult task that the independent commission in our province will have, but I look forward to working with our colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac and others on these important issues.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be entering the debate on this subject. I am glad the minister covered basically how redistribution works. That way, I do not have to explain how it functions to residents back in Alberta.

One difference of opinion that I have with the minister is that he said this was a substantive piece of legislation. Actually, I would say that it is not a significant piece of legislation, and that is why I like it. It is actually one of the smallest changes that could possibly be made to the redistribution formula and it preserves the entirety of the Fair Representation Act, basically the principles and the substance of what Stephen Harper passed in 2011. That is why I like it: It is such a small change.

The grandfathering clause of 1985 basically ensured that provinces would get the same number of seats that they had before 1985. They could not fall below that number, and this is an update to the 43rd Parliament, so I see no great change in this. The effect is basically what I call the banking of the seats so that no province in the future, should conditions change, would lose extra seats in a future redistribution.

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I looked back at 1988. The three fastest-growing provinces were British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. British Columbia had 32 seats; Alberta had 26 seats; Ontario had 99 seats. In the 2019 election, there were 42 seats for British Columbia, 34 seats for Alberta and 121 seats for Ontario. When I looked that up, I saw that it was a 10-seat gain as a floor for British Columbia, an eight-seat gain as a floor for Alberta, and a 22-seat gain for Ontario. We have to admit that Ontario remains heavily under-represented, even with this change to our legislation. It is about 40% of the population. It is a huge province in our Confederation. There is no doubt about that. Ontario was the largest province at the time of Confederation as well, and it continues that history to this day.

There are a couple of points I also want to make on past Supreme Court cases. This often comes up when there is a lot of confusion with the American political culture of one person, one vote. That is not the direct principle that is applied in Canada. In a Saskatchewan electoral boundaries case from 1991, the Supreme Court found in a section 3 charter case that in this country the principle is effective representation, and that looks toward smaller ridings. Ridings are also very expansive in terms of territory. While spatial limits are not directly in the legislation, there is that idea of effective representation.

As the minister said, how we represent our constituents is difficult, and there is a tension between two ideas here. There are those of us who are in very large ridings. I have the second-largest riding in Canada by population size and my colleague from Edmonton—Wetaskiwin has over 200,000 people in his riding, so members can imagine the volume of emails, phone calls and meetings we would have to have in order to meet with all of our constituents so that they believe they are being well represented.

On the other side is spatial representation. Many members of Parliament have very large ridings. I am thinking of northern Saskatchewan, the territories and a riding like Labrador. Labrador is a difficult riding to represent in good weather, and I cannot imagine how difficult it is to represent constituents in bad weather when one cannot travel the long distances and has to stay overnight in very remote communities. There is a tension inherent in that type of representation, so I want to recognize that. In this redistribution, we try to aim for effective representation. This small change to the formula would achieve that. There was also the case of *Figueroa v. Canada* in 2003 that equally looked at that issue.

I want to admit another thing here. I love Yiddish proverbs, as members know, and to a worm in horseradish, the world is horseradish. This is truly something that very few Canadians will pay close attention to. I see the parliamentary secretary to the House leader chuckling at that. This is horseradish. Truthfully, “inside baseball” would be a more common saying, but I love the Yiddish version of it much more and I love horseradish too. I recognize that a lot of Canadians will struggle in recognizing why we are having this prolonged debate on redistribution, so I want to make the point here, because I do believe it is important.

We do these redistributions every 10 years, essentially, and we have been doing them basically since our country was founded in 1867. When I went back through all the Parliaments in the past, I saw that in two Parliaments there was a reduction in the number of seats between one election to the next, in three Parliaments there

were an equal number of changes and in 20 Parliaments there was an increase in the number of seats. I want to note some of them.

● (1050)

The first Parliament in which there was a reduction of seats was the Parliament in 1892. In 1892, the redistribution actually reduced seats for three different provinces. That reduction happened to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. The three Parliaments in which there would be an equal number of seats at the next election were 1903, 1933 and 1999.

Parliament has been growing as well. We are sitting in a new chamber as the Centre Block is being renovated, being taken apart and updated for the 21st century in order for us to keep doing our work on behalf of constituents. We have grown a lot.

We had 181 seats at the start of Confederation in 1867, and our parliament has grown to 338 members. With this change to the law, we were set to go to 342 members, but we will actually be going to 343 members if this legislation passes and receives the Governor General's assent. The last major changes I saw were in 1966, when the Parliament went down one seat and there were significant changes all around. In that redistribution, Quebec lost a seat, Nova Scotia lost a seat, Manitoba lost a seat and Saskatchewan actually lost four seats.

That was the last redistribution I could find in which there was a loss of seats to the provinces until 1999. In 1999 there was a seat lost for the Northwest Territories, but that is because it was being split. That does not really count as a loss, because we just split the territory in two and afforded effective representation for Nunavut. I think that is entirely fair. I have never heard anybody complain about that, as they needed their own member of Parliament to represent them properly in this Parliament.

I wanted to bring that here because I wanted to make sure that people understand that this House has continued to grow as our population has grown. We compare ourselves to other chambers all across the world, but I do not think that is an effective comparison. I also do not believe that it is a fair comparison. Often we are compared to the Americans and to the mother Parliament in the United Kingdom. Those are unfair comparisons that we make. This is Canada, and we make the determination of how many seats are needed and how many members of Parliament are needed for us to do our work effectively on behalf of our constituents.

I also want to say that I am a regular reader of The Hub, which is an Ontario-based political dialogue podcast. It also sends out a morning jolt. There was an article this morning by Mark Johnson, who is a former Conservative candidate. He spoke of an idea I have heard quite often, which is that we have enough MPs in this House and that we could not possibly fit any more into this House. I was just looking at the chamber layout; we have seven empty seats in here, so if this change passes and we add five new seats, we can accommodate those five members of Parliament without having to change anything here.

I have probably said this before during the Standing Orders debate: I would be more than fine to move toward the benches model that they have in the United Kingdom. Then we would have more than enough seats for all the members of Parliament to do the work they need to do in this House.

Redistribution, every time it is done, draws its critics. I remember that back in 2011, the Stephen Harper government, the government at the time, had to propose legislation twice before it was able to pass it eventually at the very end of 2011. It was then called the Fair Representation Act. In the current legislation, I see the formula remaining the same and preserving the legacy of Stephen Harper. I know the Liberal government will find itself in the difficult position of preserving the legacy of Stephen Harper in this legislation, as it should.

Density will always keep growing in urban areas. That is a fact of life. That is a reality that Canada and other industrialized nations have experienced for well over 100 years now. There will always be a tension between cities that are growing and need more representation as they grow in population size, versus the regions where increasingly large rural ridings are becoming more and more difficult for members of Parliament to represent because of highway connections and the increasing number of mayors and city councilors and local events members need to go to. There are Legion halls to attend and local housing affordability task forces that are created.

These are all the difficulties between urban representation versus rural representation. One is not better than the other; there are just different tensions and different difficulties that every single member of Parliament needs to meet.

In this redistribution that is posted online on Elections Canada's website, there is a quotient that says that the average that Elections Canada uses in calculating redistribution is 121,891.

• (1055)

As I said before, there are over 170,000 people in my riding, and my riding continues to grow. There are still communities being built, just like in the riding of Calgary Rocky Ridge, which is diagonally opposed to mine on the other side of the city of Calgary. It continues to grow as new suburbs and subdivisions continue to be built. That is the case for a lot of my colleagues. We live in growing communities. There are members for British Columbia and Ontario who experience these exact points.

This takes me to another point I want to make. The member for Mégantic—L'Érable, the deputy leader of the Conservative Party, moved that the House oppose any federal electoral redistribution scenario that would cause Quebec or any other province or territory

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to lose one or more electoral districts in the future, and that the House call on the government to act accordingly. There was a lone voice in the House that rejected this.

I note that the substance and principle of that idea is inside the Bill C-14 legislation that has been moved. I like to tell constituents back home, as well as my colleagues, that all unanimous consent motions have an impact, whether they are agreed to or not. Some of them make the news and some of them make waves, but they all obviously have an impact. It seems that the minister perhaps took note of that and decided to do it.

I want to talk about the percentages in this redistribution, because Alberta and Albertans would be gaining the most seats of any province in Confederation. We would be gaining three seats in this redistribution, which would take us from 34 seats to 37 seats. This is great news for Alberta. We have been trying to get much closer to representation by population, or as close as we can get to it. In this redistribution, by my count we would have 10.7% of the seats while we have about 11.6% of the population. British Columbia, for example, would have 12.5% of the seats and 13.68% of the population.

We are moving in the right direction. Ten years from now, at the next redistribution debate, the MPs who will be there will have to create a brand new formula to increasingly adjust for the rapidly growing populations in the three fast-growing provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Perhaps there will be a new province. Perhaps the great province of Manitoba will start to grow at a pace where we should adjust its representation count then. I hope that happens, and I hope they elect a massive number of Conservative members to the House so we can represent them really well in a strong majority national Conservative government, when we earn the right to govern some day.

I also want to talk about Ontario. By my count, with the redistribution Ontario would have 35.5% of the seats and a population size of about 38.9%. Ontario continues to be under-represented, but it is also the province with the most representation in the House, as it was at the very beginning of Confederation.

I will also note that, if this legislation passes, the province of Quebec would continue to have and enjoy a demographic weight equal or proportional to its size in the House of Commons, with 22.7% of the seats to 22.5% of the population. It has it just about right. In fact, the representation rule, created back in 2011 in the Fair Representation Act, ensures that any province that was about to lose any seats would then be apportioned based on the percentage of its population in Canada.

Canada is a fast-growing country, and that rule was introduced equally to all provinces. It would apply to any province in a redistribution to make sure it always had that percentage representation in Canada.

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That is why I like this legislation. There is a lot to like for Albertans. We would be banking our seats. We would be gaining the most seats of any province in Canada, and getting closer to that representation by population that I, as a westerner and especially a prairie Canadian, really like to see, because Alberta is a fast-growing province. We are expected to reach that point of getting over five million people within the next decade. I want to make sure my province is well represented here and that we continue to represent it properly by having enough people.

I think all of us will recognize that, over the past four months, representation has been made much more difficult. It has been much tougher to get back to the thousands of emails and hundreds of phone calls we have been receiving. Everybody wants to hear from their member of Parliament. They do not want to hear from a staff member. They do not want to get a stock email. They want that personal, authentic touch point. They want to hear directly from the person they voted for, or voted against, in order to hear their views and opinions, and to talk to the person who represents them in the people's chamber: in the House of Commons. That is entirely fair.

• (1100)

On October 29, I wrote a Substack. I have a Substack newsletter that I send to about 8,500 people in my riding who subscribe to it. I wrote that, should the Liberal government propose to Parliament any changes to the apportioning of seats, away from the Harper 2011 formula, I would make the case for apportioning seats to representation by population for every province in Confederation.

There is the rep-by-pop idea, which I started speaking about, and the Supreme Court decision rendered in 1991 that talked about effective representation, when we do not have a direct one-person, one-vote system. We believe in effective representation, but we strive for representation by population. The percentage of a province's population in Canada should be closely reflected in the number of seats it gets in the House of Commons. I wanted to keep my promise to my constituents and make sure that I raised that issue in the House on their behalf, as I said I would.

Representation by population would ensure that, by my count, Alberta would get an extra three seats, British Columbia would get another four seats and Ontario would get about an extra 10 seats. This is obviously on top of the current ones that are going to be apportioned to them. That would bring us closer and would update that rule, so that the three fastest-growing provinces would be much closer to representation by population.

That is not in this legislation, but despite that, I wanted to make the point that in the future, when members of Parliament look at redistribution again, in perhaps just under 10 years, they will look back at debates, as I did. I looked back at debates from 2011, and I noticed that a few Liberal MPs, who later became cabinet ministers, noted that perhaps we should get rid of the grandfather clause.

Actually, one MP was a former professor from Montreal: Stéphane Dion mentioned it during those debates in 2011. I read those debates because I think that is where we get the most information from. What were people thinking when they passed that legislation?

Again, in 2011, the Stephen Harper government added 30 seats to the House. It was one of the largest redistribution increases ever made, to bring us on the path to ensuring we had that representation by population. It was getting closer to that ideal that many of us in the west, and in Pacific Canada as well, see as the right way of representing constituencies, recognizing that the Supreme Court in 1991 talked about effective representation.

I wanted to make sure I mentioned that, because I told constituents that I would indeed do that, as well.

The issue of under-representation will continue in this country. That is just a fact of life. In five years, even if we added seats today, people would still be complaining about being under-represented because of population movements. People vote with their feet the most. That is how people decide where they want to live and where they want to raise families, where they want to put down deep roots in a community, and where, eventually, they want to be buried and have their future grandchildren live, work, play and contribute to their local communities. People vote with their feet, at the end of the day. There is an entire realm of activities people do before elections to participate in the civic process.

The last point that I will make on the civic process is that the electoral boundaries commissions are the way in the country that we can get involved in the electoral boundaries process. Anybody can get involved and send in information on what they think boundary redistribution should look like for their area, and whether municipalities should be added or removed. I also bring up this fact because there are only three people on these boundaries commissions who make these decisions. People can remind them of difficulties.

If we draw a boundary where there is no easy highway access, how is a member of Parliament supposed to represent the area if they have to, say, do a two-hour detour in order to get to a community? If we are going to only look at population and we have a riding that is about four streets by 12 blocks, that is also difficult to represent if we are going up and down condo towers all the time. There will be very few community events, but maybe we will have an extremely high population size that will lead to hundreds of emails a week.

Before January, I remember that I was getting about, as I calculated, 65 unique emails a day. There was a point during the Emergencies Act, when the government invoked it, that I was getting about 1,000 emails a day from constituents for almost 10 days. I checked, and they were from constituents in the riding. That is an incredible volume of correspondence that I had to get to. It has changed. Email is much easier than it used to be.

I like this legislation. This is legislation I can vote for. I believe that a government that legislates the least damages the population the least. I am a minimalist when it comes to these things. This is the least bad option I can see the government could have moved forward to. For Albertans, it preserves the three seats of weight-gaining in this redistribution, and this is Stephen Harper's Conservative government legacy.

• (1105)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank our colleague for Calgary Shepard for his thoughtful presentation. I agree with much of what he said, particularly around the importance of effective representation. Also, regarding people participating in the electoral boundary redistribution process by making presentations, and community groups and municipal leaders taking advantage of public participation with the commissions, I agree with him on that.

I thank him for his willingness to support this legislation and send it to committee. I hope we can work collaboratively.

We deliberately designed, as I said in answer to a question from another colleague, and maybe in this case I agree with him also on the importance of minimalist legislation, something that surgically respects what all members want in relation to a grandfather clause that does not see a loss of seats for any province, so I hope we can work collaboratively on this.

Perhaps I can ask my colleague a question quickly. He talked about effective representation and the importance of big ridings, such as he has. Would he be in favour of potentially increasing resources to members of Parliament to better serve their constituents in the face of those increasing demands as well?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I hope the minister does not agree with me too much publicly, because I still have a caucus to go back to. If members see that the minister agrees, I do not think I will make it out of the caucus meeting in one piece.

I want to recognize the minister for also providing me with a briefing session with Privy Council experts on this piece of legislation, and for the fact that he basically took the unanimous consent motion moved by the deputy leader of the Conservative Party.

I would support more resources for members of Parliament. There is already a system in place for those of us who have very large ridings or large population increases. I would love to hire more people and more interns to serve my constituents.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Calgary Shepard said some interesting things in his speech, in particular that this makes sense.

What does not make sense is the pattern of institutionalization of the francophone minority, in particular Quebec, that we have seen since Quebec, formerly known as Lower Canada, was integrated into the Canadian Confederation. Back in 1867, Quebec's representation was 36%, but today that figure is just 22%.

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There is another thing that makes perfect sense. In the Charlottetown accord that was proposed in 1992, the Progressive Conservative Party gave the Quebec nation 25% of the seats, even though its demographic weight had declined. In 2006, the Harper government recognized the Quebec nation.

Does my colleague agree that the Quebec nation should always retain 25% of the seats in the House, regardless of its demographics?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

As a francophile from Alberta, my answer to his question would be no, because our country's population is represented proportionally. I remind him that there was a referendum in 1992 and that Canadians voted against this. Furthermore, 58% of Quebecers voted against the Charlottetown accord, even though it contained this provision to allocate 25% of the seats to the province of Quebec.

We are a bicultural country with two official languages, French and English, and I think that the demographic weight is protected in this legislation.

• (1110)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rather surprised to hear that someone read the speeches members gave 10 years ago to find out what people thought of the legislative review.

I disagree with what my colleague said about how the system is based exclusively on the proportional representation of the population, because our system functions by exception, with those exceptions being the senatorial clause, the territorial clause for the three northern territories, and the grandfather clause for certain provinces.

Why then do we not come up with a clause to recognize the weight of the Quebec nation in Parliament? Why is my colleague dismissing that idea out of hand when his government is the one that passed a motion in the House to recognize Quebec as a nation?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the government member for his question. I simply want to remind him that I am not the one who said that. Fifty-eight per cent of Quebecers voted against that in the referendum on the Charlottetown accord in 1992.

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Calgary Shepard for the incredible work he has done. It is not a surprise, as he is somebody who dives right into whatever file he has.

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I have a question for him, and I apologize if it was already brought up, as I am doing my House duty from the beautiful riding of Cariboo—Prince George.

Does this bill respect the constitutional right to representation by population? I am in one of the largest ridings, at 84,000 square kilometres, and I am proud to represent this riding. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's comment on that.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, yes, I believe this is entirely constitutional. It preserves the idea of effective representation in our country, and it kind of looks to the past this time. It takes the representation formula of 2011 to its logical conclusion, which is basically an increase of 34 seats and preserving one seat for a single province that is about to lose one. The total number of seats the Harper legacy added to this chamber will be 35 in the end. It is entirely constitutional.

Again, a banking of seats would be done in Bill C-14, with the addition of seats so we can get closer to representation by population, which is a philosophical ideal that we should adhere to. The Supreme Court said “effective representation”, and that would be preserved through the electoral boundaries commission process.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the comments made by the member with regard to the differentiation between urban and rural, because there is a significant difference in the type of representation there.

I am wondering if the member can expand on this. Is he trying to say between the lines that it should be a smaller percentage of population in rural areas than in the bigger urban areas? Is that what he is trying to indirectly imply?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, there is already a rule that the boundaries commission uses. It can either increase by 25% or decrease by 25% when it is making the final determination on what the map should look like.

I will raise this interesting point. Many of my rural colleagues have schools in their ridings. I did not have a high school in my riding until just a few years ago, which would be shocking for most people to realize. I now have one high school in my entire riding of 170,000-plus constituents, residents, who live there, but I know that my colleagues in the rural regions sometimes have four, five, six or seven high schools because they happen to represent several municipalities where they have regional feeder schools, basically. Others will have perhaps five, six or seven legion halls. I do not have a single legion hall in my entire riding. I had one that closed down before I even became a member of Parliament.

I also only have one cenotaph in my riding. I have seen the schedules for some members on Remembrance Day, and they have two or three days of Remembrance Day ceremonies to go to as they travel their entire ridings to make sure they attend as many of these cenotaph Remembrance Day memorials as they can. That is one way to talk about effective representation.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, from what I gather, my colleague agrees with this motion.

That is obvious since Alberta is getting four seats. I guess I would be happy too if Quebec were getting four more seats.

Some hon. members: It is three seats.

Mr. Denis Trudel: It does not really matter whether it is three or four. It is still more seats.

We are going to remain at 78 seats. Let us be frank. This bill reduces Quebec's political weight. I would appreciate it if my colleague from Victoriaville would let me—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I see that some members who do not have the floor have decided to join in the discussion, but I would ask them to wait their turn.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert may ask a quick question.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Madam Speaker, in 2010 the Conservatives introduced a bill that diminished Quebec's political weight. The National Assembly, which at that time included the very Liberal former premier Jean Charest, unanimously adopted the following motion:

That the National Assembly reaffirms that Québec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons;

That the National Assembly asks the elected Members from all political parties [in Ottawa] to abandon the passage of any bill whose effect would be to diminish the weight of the representation of Québec in the House of Commons.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I wish I could provide a much longer response, but I do not have enough time.

This was done by Stephen Harper's government in 2011. It added the representation rule that applies to any province that would lose seats in the House. The rule applied only to the province of Quebec.

As a result, Quebec received three additional seats in Parliament after 2011, so I think the demographic and political weight was maintained in 2011.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would seek the consent of the House to share my time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the outstanding member for Timmins—James Bay.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-14 in the House today. I take pride in it because of the negotiations that the NDP, my party, conducted with the Liberal minority government. This is one of our very tangible wins, a victory we achieved by negotiating and getting things for people. In this case, it is a net gain for Quebec and Quebecers.

That is not all we gained from the agreements. I could go on at length about dental care, prescription drug costs and housing, but Quebec was in danger of losing seats because of a mathematical calculation and dropping from 78 to 77 seats.

There was a consensus in Quebec that, at the very least, we had to hang on to all the seats we have, so that is what the NDP got. By applying pressure and negotiating, we protected Quebec's 78 seats for good. I am very happy about that, and it is one of the good things we achieved thanks to this agreement. The NDP achieved a significant victory for Quebec.

Could we do more? Obviously, we can discuss that at some point, but for now we are not losing any seats, and that is thanks to the NDP. I am not sure if everyone is aware, but I wanted to point that out, because the agreement is quite long. It is three pages long, and that was the last item on the third page, so it meant reading the document to the end, and I am not sure everyone did that. Representation in this Parliament is very important to us and to Quebec in general.

Any discussion about democratic rules is an important debate to have. As parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, we must be fully engaged in these discussions, because this has implications for the vitality of our democratic life, the ground rules, and the justice and fairness ensuing from those rules.

In these troubled times, especially in eastern Europe, it is important to remember how vital democracy is. I would like to commend the courage of all the democrats in Russia who dare to protest the war and who oppose President Putin's autocracy.

When establishing the rules of democracy, it is important to remember that these rules must respect what used to be called, at the time, popular sovereignty, that is, the fact that it is the expression of citizens' choice to send people to represent them, with opinions, political agendas and ideologies, and that all these citizens are considered to be equal. That is the fundamental principle of democracy. Unlike an aristocracy, there is no individual who is above any other, who is appointed by God or who has greater powers than others. All citizens are equal, and that is how we start the discussion on democracy.

Are we all as equal as we think under the first past the post system? I will come back to that. There may be an opportunity to have that discussion.

In a federation, there is more than just the rule of the size and weight of the population. We have set other equally important rules. I will name a few of them because it is important to bear them in mind when having these discussions.

Another rule is the senatorial clause, which states that a province cannot have fewer MPs than senators. It could be called the "P.E.I. clause" for those four MPs.

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The territorial clause is also quite easy to understand. It ensures that each of the northern territories has an MP, meaning one for Yukon, one for the Northwest Territories, and now one for Nunavut. Although their demographic weight may not justify it under Elections Canada's rules, it is important and essential to keep it that way.

• (1120)

Lastly, the grandfather clause guaranteed that certain provinces were protected and could not have their number of seats reduced. That is where Bill C-14 makes a difference.

Quebec will be included in this grandfather clause, as will all the other provinces. For now, this protects Quebec, which was the only province at risk of losing a seat under the current redistribution. This measure will serve Quebec in the very short term, but also in future. We are pleased to see that, following the agreement we negotiated, a bill was quickly introduced to uphold this aspect of the agreement.

We have to ask ourselves if we can go further, and I know there have been discussions. Not so long ago, I had the opportunity to deliver a speech on Bill C-246, which would maintain Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons at a certain percentage.

This is not a new idea; it was included in the Charlottetown accord that Mulroney's federal government negotiated with the Bourassa government in Quebec. The accord was not adopted, however, so it was not implemented, but the idea has been brought up again.

I think there should be some serious discussions on the possibility of another interpretive clause, a Quebec clause. Since Parliament has recognized Quebec as a nation, this clause could be included in order to protect Quebec's democratic weight in the House of Commons.

Furthermore, the House recognized that Quebec is a nation, and the NDP recognized it as well, in its support for the Charlottetown accord at the time, in its Sherbrooke declaration, in its internal documents and, obviously, in its votes in the House. There is this idea of formally recognizing the concept of two founding peoples, which helped create the vision and perception of a bicultural, bilingual federation. That is one of the reasons we still have the Official Languages Act. It is in keeping with that idea.

I must admit that I always feel a little uneasy talking about two founding peoples because this disregards the fact that the first nations and indigenous peoples were already here. Our French and British ancestors were not the first to set foot on this land. There had already been people, nations, communities and cultures here for millennia.

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In our discussions of the quality of democratic life and the representation of peoples and nations in the House, I think that we should also take into account the place of the first nations, Inuit and Métis. Other countries do that. I think either Australia or New Zealand does it, probably New Zealand. Perhaps this should be part of our discussion.

Furthermore, in the interest of strengthening our democracy and upholding the equality of our citizens, we should really be discussing proportional representation. Unfortunately, this subject was dismissed by the Liberal government in 2016 when it buried the majority report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, of which I was a member. We are one of the few countries in the world without a proportional component to our voting system.

If we had proportional representation, the representation of political movements and parties would be based on a very simple rule: if a party gets 25% of the vote, it should get 25% of the seats. The winner-takes-all nature of the current system creates unacceptable distortions, because a party that wins just 40% of the vote can get 60% or 65% of the seats. That means that the majority who disagreed with the government end up in the opposition, and the government can do pretty much whatever it wants for four years.

We must therefore remember to consider the possibility of proportional voting, as well as the other elements of the agreement that the NDP negotiated to facilitate access to the vote, such as on-campus polling stations, the ability to vote at one of several polling stations on election day, and multi-day voting periods for general elections. These are other measures we should discuss in the future.

● (1125)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to pick up on something the member made reference to. At the very end of his speech, he started talking about the different potential changes we have seen. For example, in the last federal election, we had more engagement with mail-in ballots. When we talk about electoral changes going forward, there are some very important aspects of Elections Canada and the way we implement things to make sure that our elections are fair, effective and engaging.

I am wondering if the member would provide some additional thoughts in regard to voter empowerment and how we can see a higher percentage of people going out to vote.

[Translation]

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

It is true, there is still much work to do on this bill. There are still many things that need to be improved in order to make it easier to vote. We could, for example, make it easier to vote by mail and count the votes more rapidly.

Unfortunately, in the last general election, there were no polling stations on university campuses. We know that young people are the least likely to vote during elections, and students are part of that population. Depriving them of access to polling stations on campus

had a serious adverse impact. We will have to talk about this. If someone does not know exactly where to go to vote on election day, the ability to go to one of several different polling stations in the same riding without being turned away would facilitate voting.

I think that all of the political parties want to improve our democratic vitality.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Quebec for his speech.

[English]

Once again, I would like to take the opportunity to ask a question of the hon. member regarding the importance of ensuring that our rural communities and small towns also maintain proper representation in the House because, obviously, we represent, in these types of communities and small areas, a lot of the GDP. It is where a lot of Canadians' food and resources are developed, grown and sent to market.

With all of our deliberations, and as we make sure that the population is properly represented and distributed in the House, we want to also ensure that the voices of rural Canadians are represented as well. Does he have any thoughts on that matter?

[Translation]

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

An urban-rural balance is important. My colleague probably knows that I represent a very urban, densely populated riding, with a population of about 110,000 packed into just 11 square kilometres.

I think that it is important that the electoral boundaries commission's calculations allow for some deviation from the average, so that a riding with a population 20% or 25% lower than the average can still be represented by a member in the House. This would make it possible to account for rural realities in Quebec and Canada.

● (1130)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's speech, despite our fundamental disagreements. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie explained how an opposition party can achieve gains in a parliamentary system. We do not agree that the bill before us is one of those ways. In fact, even if Quebec keeps the same number of seats, if its weight declines, it declines. That is what people need to realize, and it is important to mention it.

My question to the hon. member will be two-pronged.

First, the Bloc Québécois tabled a bill that would maintain the number of seats in Quebec at 25% of the total at all times. Will my colleague be voting in favour of the bill?

Also, the Bloc Québécois believes that the only way to really maintain our weight over time is if we are able to make all of our own decisions and place all powers in the hands of the only parliament where the Quebec nation holds 100% of the seats. We call that independence. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite was once in favour of independence. How does he feel about it today?

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

I would remind him that, to achieve sovereignty, he should get himself elected to Quebec's National Assembly, if that is really what he wants.

For now, here, we are trying to defend Quebec and, above all, Quebecers. I think that the NDP has represented Quebec by keeping Quebec from losing a seat. That is a victory.

With respect to the Bloc Québécois's bill, I would invite my colleague to listen to my speech. He will find all sorts of interesting information in it.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very proud to be taking part in this debate as the representative for the great riding of Timmins—James Bay.

This morning's discussions are very important, because we are talking about the principles of Canadian democracy. The principle of Canadian democracy is based on the need to maintain a balance between individual and collective rights, as well as on respect for Canada's regional differences. This is crucial, and it is especially essential that we respect the unique contributions of Canada's francophone communities.

I represent the great riding of Timmins—James Bay in northern Ontario, and the Franco-Ontarian community has fought very hard for language rights and access to services in French. In Timmins, I have seen the power of the francophone identity at work, developing the entire region while working with anglophones and indigenous communities. For me, that is a symbol of our country's power.

[English]

I want to speak this morning on the importance of the bill before us and the reason the New Democratic Party pushed the government in negotiations to maintain the seats in Quebec. It is about a larger principle that we have.

We often talk about representation by population and the right of citizens to be represented, but we know that Canada would not work this way, because we have certain regions that have much larger populations than others. Historically, the compromise that Confederation was built on was respecting that, if we were going to come together, certain smaller regions, for example, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, would be able to maintain their presence with their number of seats.

An hon. member: And Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, as my good colleague says, there is also Newfoundland and Labrador. I should never have left them out. They were the last to the game but brought the best with them.

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However, the issue of Quebec is also really important because this is the francophone heartland of North America. They not only have that right as one of the founding nations but it is important to understand that, as the rest of the country grows and develops, and Quebec continues to grow and develop, maintaining that traditional balance is really fundamental.

Representation by population is a principle in Canada, but when we look at the differences in population size, we are dealing with very divergent realities in Canada. For example, in Manitoba, the average riding has about 70,000 people. In New Brunswick, it is about 50,000 to 80,000. In Labrador, it is 26,000 people. Western Arctic has 41,000, and Nunavut has 21,000.

If we say that, because Mississauga—Erindale has a population of 143,361, Nunavut should not have its own separate identity in Parliament, or that Yukon with its 30,000 people should not have a weighted balance, it would, of course, be unacceptable. The issues in the Yukon are fundamentally different from other regions. It is the same thing with Quebec. We need to say that there has to be a balance. We have to have that fundamental principle that we based this nation on.

Of course, we talked about the two founding peoples, which completely ignored the people who were already here. We do need to address the fact that, in our Parliament and in our nation, we have not respected the rights of the original people, and that to have a truly democratic society, we will need to have a much more full-some revision of how we see our nation based on the rights of the first people and their treaty rights being heard in a much more diverse, democratic form. However, that does not take away the right of Quebec and the francophone community to have a strong presence maintained and supported, and we are sending the message that we recognize this.

One of the principles that we based the democratic representation by population on was sort of representation by population by region. There is this principle that, by region, we are not supposed to have more than a 25% divergence in population, as that would somehow be unfair.

● (1135)

That might work in Manitoba. That might work in New Brunswick. The big failure, of course, is Ontario. Again, there are ridings of 140,000 people down in the suburban belt around Toronto, but in Kenora there is 64,000 people. That is a riding that is bigger than most European countries. My region of Timmins—James Bay is bigger than France and Germany. It is easier for someone in Toronto to fly to Portugal for the weekend than it is for one of my constituents in Peawanuck to fly down to meet me at my office in Timmins.

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Those are democratic deficits that have to be recognized. In seat redistribution in Ontario, if we say it is fair to add more seats into Mississauga and more seats into Etobicoke because that is where the population is growing, and that we will take those seats from far northern regions and make them bigger, at a certain point these ridings become unworkable for democratic access. If anybody wants a lesson in this, they could just ask the Speaker in her off time about what she has to travel to represent all her communities. It is a fundamental right of a Canadian citizen to be able to speak to their member of Parliament and get services.

We do know that much of the work that used to be done by the federal government has been devolved to our offices as MPs. We are the immigration service. We are the pension service. For people who are in regions that are so big that it is impossible to access their MP's office or who may only get there once a year, those people are actually facing more of a democratic deficit than others. For example, when I lived in downtown Toronto, I could walk 15 minutes to two different MP offices. That is a huge fundamental difference.

We have an ongoing debate and discussion about democracy in Canada. I would like to say that democracy is not finished business; it is unfinished business. It will change. We have to encourage more diversity. We are not a diverse House yet, yet our nation is increasingly diverse. We have to find ways to make it more diverse. We have to recognize the strengths of rural, isolated northern regions and maintain what democratic access they have, while understanding that urban centres are growing at an explosive rate and understanding that in Canada we have a diversity of languages, which has made us much stronger, but that we were founded on the principle that there was going to be this accord between the anglophone and the francophone communities. That right to bilingual service is important.

As a Franco-Ontarian the Speaker knows this much better than me, but in my region young anglo families want to send their children to the French schools. The growth of the francophone services in the north, to me, is a sign that we are growing in a diverse way and we are building on the fundamental strengths of our nation. We have to add to that strength. The rights of the indigenous communities have been long ignored, but we are seeing transformation there as well.

One of the things that they told us, when Parliament was first formed, was that some of this regional balance would be handled by the Senate. Of course, we were told that the Senate would be this representation for regions. We have Mike Duffy, the famous senator from come-from-away. I do not know when the last time was he ever stepped foot on Prince Edward Island. The two most famous fictional characters on Prince Edward Island are Anne of Green Gables and Mike Duffy, but he got a paycheque and he is there until he is 75.

I would not say that just because someone flipped pancakes at Liberal fundraising breakfasts or was a bagman for the Conservatives they should be in the Senate, but that is supposedly the historical compromise that we created to let them hang out forever and never get fired. We cannot get rid of them. God almighty, look at Pamela Wallin. We are paying those paycheques. To me, that is not democratic.

We have a real opportunity and a necessity in this place to debate how we make more representation, more diverse representation and more democratic representation.

● (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague gave a very interesting speech. However, his party voted in favour of the motion that was debated on a previous supply day that read in part, and I quote:

...

(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;

....

He cannot be happy that, today, Bill C-14 meets and delivers on only one of the conditions he voted for. If he recognizes Quebec as a nation, he will agree with us and vote in favour of our bill, which will ensure that the Quebec nation's political weight is maintained by allocating 25% of the seats in the House to Quebec.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Obviously, Madam Speaker. I thank my colleague for that great question.

I also appreciate the Bloc Québécois acknowledging the good work the NDP has done to protect their participation in Parliament. That is the result of our negotiations with the Liberal Party.

[English]

Yes, we are very proud that we were the ones who said that we were not going to cut any Quebec seats. As for other options my colleague is talking about, he can bring those issues forward. We would be more than happy to look at them.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member briefly talked about rural representation and the fact he was able to reach two members of Parliament in one of Canada's major cities, but representation by population was part of the great debates of Confederation from Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine. Their statues are right here on Parliament Hill.

That debate, in colonial Parliament, is basically the debate of Confederation. The first part of that debate was about who is responsible to whom. The cabinet is responsible to the House of Commons. The second part was about how the House of Commons is created and who gets to sit here, because originally it was basically a duality between eastern Canada and Upper and Lower Canada.

I wonder if the member may be able to talk more about higher principles that should apply here to the type of representation we need in this chamber. As the three fastest growing provinces gain population, they should receive more members of Parliament, because there is a variety of views from those provinces, and those views should be represented as much as possible, proportionately, here in this chamber.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

When we look back on those early debates around Confederation, one of the things that has transformed, now that we have the three territories and the 10 provinces, is that the power has been devolved to the provinces. It is much greater than anyone at that time would have imagined.

It is within the provinces that 80% or 90% of one's engagement with government happens, so the provinces are very strongly represented, in terms of their rights and in terms of how we sit as a federation of various regions. This is an important discussion, and certainly populations are growing in a number of the provinces, but we have fundamental obligations to protect.

I know many people wonder why in God's name Prince Edward Island has so many seats when its population is smaller than the city of Sudbury, but I was not there to sign the original Confederation, so I accept the results. The difference with Quebec is that it is a francophone centre of identity. It is not just a province, and we have recognized in Parliament, including under Stephen Harper, that it is a nation within Canada.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a very simple math question.

How can going from a little over 23% to a little over 22% be described as a gain?

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, the Bloc was upset it was going to lose a seat, and the NDP protected that seat. I think that is a pretty simple thing.

If Bloc members have other plans, they can come to us and we can negotiate on their behalf with the Liberals, but since they just want to sit on the sidelines, I do not know whether they are bringing forward anything or they are just upset, but if they need any help, they can just call us.

We defended that seat; we will defend other rights too.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, with regard to the NDP's help, Quebec tried in 2011 and elected 59 NDP members. Today there is only one left, and that is enough. I would therefore thank my colleague for his suggestion.

When I began teaching at André-Laurendeau CEGEP in 1993—I am showing my age—I was an economics teacher in the social sciences department. Once, we were discussing which of the sciences was the most important, and an economist, who was far older than I was, said something that struck me. He said that he believed that demographics was more important than most people thought.

My father used to tell me that, if I wanted to understand something today, I had to know about history and the past. Today, I will try to explain things by referring to the past, and I will try to explain why Quebec is in the situation it is today and why demographics works against it. In other words, numerical strength is what most matters in history and in the history of peoples.

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Let us start at the beginning. In 1759, the French were defeated on the Plains of Abraham. People wonder why Quebecers are different from other Canadians, arguing that everyone is the same. Here is the first difference: Quebec's history books talk about the defeat on the Plains of Abraham. The history books of the vast majority of members in the House talk about the victory on the Plains of Abraham.

When we lost the battle on the Plains of Abraham, there were 65,000 francophones on the territory, not just in Quebec, but across North America. However, there were more than one million anglophones. We were therefore doomed to disappear; we were a people under threat.

Some of the French returned to France, including prominent figures and people in important positions. Those who remained were defenceless and had no political or economic power. The French who left, even if they said they loved those they were leaving, were certain that a few years later no one would be speaking French in North America. We were therefore doomed to disappear. However, here we are, still speaking French today, and we are extremely proud of that.

Now let us take a good look at why we are still speaking French.

The first reason is the *revanche des berceaux*, the baby boom in Quebec. We were great at making babies, and we had lots of them. To understand why we were so productive, we have to go back to 1665 and Jean Talon, who understood the strength in numbers; since there were not enough of us, he told us to make babies.

I do hope the Quebec government will not adopt that idea and promote the same pro-birth policy, but it is worth saying that people got a cash bonus for their 10th child, a larger bonus for their 12th, and free education for their 26th. Parents did not know all their children and used name tags to keep their names straight.

The concept of a large family therefore became part of our culture, and we were by far the best in the world at it. It allowed us to change our destiny and resist assimilation.

In 1837 and 1838, during the patriots' rebellions, the anglophones who had barred us from political and economic power of course found us irritating. They asked Lord Durham what they should do with us, because they were concerned and had not seen us coming.

Lord Durham analyzed the situation and decreed that the problem was simple and that it was war between francophones and anglophones. That was not necessarily the case, since there were also patriots in Upper Canada. However, that is how he saw the situation. He very amiably said that we were a people without a culture and without a history, and that our salvation—because Lord Durham was a great humanist—was assimilation.

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Not in so many words, he recognized the strength in numbers and saw that francophones had to become as small a minority as possible. Numerical strength would get the better of this odd people, because no one understood what was going on with us.

• (1150)

Then came 1867. The creation of Canada as we know it was the destiny predicted by Lord Durham. It institutionalized our minority status. Before that, we were the majority. However, the anglophones thought that, since francophones made up the majority, there should be equal representation of Canada East and Canada West. That way, the francophones would not have more political power than the anglophones.

When francophones became the minority, the anglophones remembered Lord Durham and decided it was time to rely on numerical strength. Consequently, when Canada was created in 1867, our political power dropped to 36%. That is the important thing to remember: Numerical strength is tied to political power. If we leave things as they are, our political power will dissipate into nothing. That is what I am getting at.

From that point on, despite fighting tooth and nail and demonstrating incredible resilience, francophones outside Quebec saw their population become anglicized and their presence and political weight diminish, and they had to fight for essential services in their language. It happened again recently. There are lessons to be learned from history. We saw what happened last week in British Columbia. Franco-Columbians wanted services in French, notably education services, and they moved heaven and earth for their cause. They even fought the federal government.

When the French left in 1759, they thought we were finished. In 1950, however, Félix Leclerc came on the scene. When the French thought we were all but gone, Félix Leclerc started singing songs about who we are and the fact that we speak French. The French were amazed and wondered how we had done it, how we had managed to survive for 200 years. To them, it seemed like a miracle. Yves Duteil even wrote a song for the people of Quebec, one of the most beautiful French-language songs, which salutes the Quebec resistance and pays tribute to Félix Leclerc by imagining him, in the song, as the swallow.

I would like to read some of the lyrics that show just how exceptional Quebec is:

It's a beautiful language on the other side of the world
A bubble of France in the north of a continent
Held in a vice but still so fruitful
Locked in the ice at the top of a volcano
It built bridges across the Atlantic
It left its home for another land
And like a swallow transported by the spring
It returns to sing of its sorrows and hopes
It tells us that in that far-off country of snow
It faced the winds blowing from all directions
To impose its words even in the schools
And that our own language is still spoken there

Quebeckers' bulwark against extinction came in 1960. Before that, Quebec and francophones were barely getting by. Francophones were thought of as hewers of wood and drawers of water,

people with no political weight. They had to speak English to be allowed to work in a factory. They had no economic power.

The Quiet Revolution changed everything. That is when we created an extraordinary tool for our own protection, namely the Quebec state. In 1960, the Quebec state began opening political and economic doors for us. Our culture was already flourishing, but now there was a cultural explosion. From then on, we were able to proudly shout to the world who we were.

The Quebec state is our government. It defends and protects us. That must never be forgotten. I know that when Bloc Québécois members are in the House, our rhetoric concerning the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces can sound harsh. There is a very simple reason for that.

• (1155)

Each time the federal government speaks or takes action, we in the House must make sure that it will not diminish the power of our defensive tool. That is why we are like this. Whenever the federal government proposes something, the way we protect ourselves is to say that, if we do not agree, the government should just send us our money and we will manage our affairs on our own. We do not need the federal government to tell us what we need. There is no one better placed to know what a Quebecker wants than a Quebecker.

Things happen here that could hinder or favour our development, as the case may be, because good things do also happen. We are here to keep an eye out and make sure no one diminishes the political power of our people, our nation. This means rejecting any reduction in the number of seats we get, but we need to go even further. Numerical strength must no longer apply because for us, back home, that is a threat. When I talk about "home", I mean our home, not here. It is a threat, and that is why numerical strength must be separated from political strength. That is essential.

There were two components to our motion of March 1. First, there must be no decrease in the number of seats. Second, there must be no loss of political power in the House for the Quebec nation. I say "Quebec nation" because, last June, the House recognized that Quebec was a nation with French as its common language. We must continue in this direction, not just with words, but with actions. This is not a distinct society like in the Meech Lake accord, where we were given something to pacify us that meant nothing. We do not want to go there again. The Quebec nation, which is recognized here, is a tool that will allow us to support concrete actions that prevent Quebec from being treated like a province like any other, and instead ensure that it is treated like a unique nation on our planet. That is what we need to do here.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, the Liberal member who just laughed thinks it is funny to hear me say that we are a unique nation. Each nation is unique. What has he just figured out? I would like to know.

We tabled Bill C-246, which would finally solve this aspect of the problem. Quebec would be guaranteed 25% of the political weight. That would halt the decline of Quebec's political weight in the House.

Trying to prevent a decrease in the number of members while allowing for an increase in the total number of members is like drowning someone in a bath. We can take the person's head and shove it under water, or we can turn on the tap and get the same result slowly. That is what we are proposing.

What people need to understand is that Quebec and Quebecers want to be better represented here. I will give an example. In 2011, Mr. Harper was elected by a majority, without Quebec's support. That is how bizarre things have gotten. It is possible to form a majority government in Canada with only five members from Quebec. That is crazy. Say that our political weight decreases. A member from any given party could stand up and say that he or she does not need what Quebecers are asking for. Things are different where this member lives because Quebec is a nation, but he or she does not care because it is possible to form a majority government without Quebec's support. That is a serious problem.

People need to understand that Quebec is a nation, and that it is only by guaranteeing its political weight that our needs will be listened to, our desires will be heard, and the decisions made by the government will always take Quebec's desires, wants and needs into account. That is what is important.

• (1200)

I will say this in conclusion. We tabled a motion, and the Bloc Québécois's position is very clearly illustrated in the motion. We are not hiding anything. We are saying that we cannot have fewer members, and we do not want less political power.

That is why we are saying that we should be discussing the bill we worked on, Bill C-246, rather than Bill C-14. Our bill is in keeping with the motion adopted by a large majority in the House.

I hope that the members will understand that we need to go further and we need to work better.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the province of Quebec today has 78 representatives here in the House of Commons. This legislation would ensure that they will have 78 seats going forward. The member makes reference to the needs and desires of the people of Quebec, and I believe that this legislation meets them. However, I do not believe that it will ever meet the needs of the Bloc Québécois because the Bloc Québécois wants to play a destructive force for the federation. The Bloc Québécois does not see what a vast majority of Canadians and a majority of people in Quebec want. They want to see a strong, healthy government that provides progressive services through things such as health care, interprovincial trade and international trade.

I am wondering if my friend could be honest by telling members of the House that there is nothing we could do that would ultimately appease the Bloc, other than the breaking up of Canada.

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[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I will not even thank my colleague for his question, because it is nonsense.

It is nonsense when the parliamentary secretary says that we are not in the House to agree with others. I will answer that I have been the House leader for two and a half years and that it is his government's leader he should be talking to. He should ask him how many times in the past two and a half years my party and I have sat down with them. When it was good for Quebec, we agreed with them.

If he thinks we are not good to them, maybe it is because they are not good to Quebec. Maybe that is the problem. When he says that the Bloc Québécois is destructive when it comes to the government, he is saying that he thinks Quebecers are destructive.

All the Bloc Québécois does in the House is defend Quebecers and do what Quebecers want us to do. When the parliamentary secretary speaks out against the Bloc Québécois, he is speaking out against Quebecers.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. Much like me, he appears to appreciate the extremely important role of our country's rural populations.

I apologize for my French. I really need to practise. I hope I will get better with time.

• (1205)

[English]

It is so important to recognize in this discussion around redistribution and proper representation within this chamber that all people from Canada, regardless of where they live or their geography, should feel like their voices are being heard within this chamber.

I wonder if the member would have some comments on the absolute importance of ensuring that our rural communities, small towns and remote areas maintain significant representation in the House because of the tremendous contributions they make regarding the very food we eat and the resources and energies we produce as a country. I know he would appreciate, being from the great province of Quebec, the tremendous amounts that even the rural regions of western Canada and Atlantic Canada have provided in resources and transfer payments to his beloved province. I am sure he would want to make sure they were represented.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my colleague and congratulating him on his French. I see that he has made an effort and I truly appreciate it.

About what he said after that, of course, people in a democracy should be properly represented. The problem is when you consider a nation or a people as a province.

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Quebec has unique needs. Its culture is different, its language is different and it has a different way of looking at the economy, a different way of looking at how we use oil, and a different way of fighting climate change.

These differences must be acknowledged, because Quebec is not a province. Quebec is a nation, and it deserves to be heard.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I feel like I should remind my colleague that the Bloc Québécois is not Quebec as a whole. The Bloc represents hundreds of thousands of Quebecers, like other political parties, including those in the House, like the NDP.

We took advantage of the government's minority status to secure gains for Quebecers, written in black and white in the agreement we negotiated, including a guarantee that Quebec will retain its 78 seats. Is that enough? Could we do more? Of course we can.

However, we were facing a very clear threat, the loss of a seat for Quebec. I know that he would rather have a root canal than admit this, but does my colleague not agree that, this time, it was the NDP that defended Quebec's interests?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. My colleague says that it is wonderful that the NDP and the Liberals joined forces to get things done. However, does he really think that he represents Quebec when he infringes upon Quebec's and the provinces' jurisdictions? Quebec does not want anyone to meddle in its affairs, and the only party that is clear on that is the Bloc Québécois, because we listen to Quebecers, and only Quebecers.

We do not make compromises. We do not have to discuss with partners, other provinces, in our caucus. The hon. member is the only NDP member from Quebec. When people call Quebecers racist, he remains silent. There is no compromise. We listen to and represent Quebecers. We stand up and speak for Quebecers.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his fascinating and impassioned history lesson. His students must have been riveted.

The Liberal and Conservative parties claim to have recognized the Quebec nation. As long as their recognition is symbolic, there is no problem. However, when it has a legislative impact, they and the NDP balk. That is precisely what is happening in the House.

The motion presented by the Bloc on its opposition day said that we did not want to lose any seats or political weight and that they must be maintained. We tabled a bill well before the supposed NDP agreement, and everyone voted for it except for a few Conservatives.

Could my colleague explain the House's logic and coherence, given that it is prepared to symbolically recognize the Quebec nation but not to attach any legislative meaning to that recognition?

• (1210)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, the reason is quite clear. We are dealing with people who love to hear themselves talk. They say that they will throw Quebecers a bone when they want something, but when it is time to take action, they disappear, nothing happens, and they are gone. They talked the talk but do not walk the walk. That is not what makes a person, politician or party great.

My colleague is correct. When it is time to defend Quebec tooth and nail, only the Bloc can do it.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the bill ensures that Quebec will keep the same number of seats it currently has. Will the hon. member across the aisle support a bill that guarantees the representation of Quebec in the House of Commons?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I must thank my colleague and congratulate her on her French. She speaks it very well.

I want to point something out. The word "Quebec" does not appear in Bill C-14. This bill applies to all of the provinces to prevent them from losing a seat by at least maintaining the status quo for that province.

It is not necessarily a gift for Quebec. Many provinces are threatened by this and so this bill works to their advantage. They might think that Quebec is getting a little treat, but so are they.

However, this is only half a treat for us. The thing that matters most is our political power, which is not guaranteed in the bill. Quebec's political weight will continue to decline, and that is not what we want.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank our leader for giving us a history lesson.

I am surprised that you did not talk about Maurice Richard, since you are a hockey fan.

Let me be clear. In my life, I have often had to negotiate with workers—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. I would remind the member that she is to address the Chair.

The hon. member can continue.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I apologize, Madam Speaker. You often have to call me to order.

I was saying that, in my life, I have often had to negotiate. When people advocated for maintaining the status quo during the negotiation of an agreement, I was able to tell the difference between fact and fiction. To me, when the status quo represents a setback, that makes it difficult to reach an agreement. Resisting and fighting for workers and the people of Quebec means being able to distinguish between a real status quo and a false one.

What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

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

They are trying to pull a fast one on us. Let us do the math. Under this bill, in 2023 or 2024, Quebec will lose political weight even if it keeps 78 MPs. That is unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to address one of the fundamental pillars of our democracy. We all recognize the importance of representation. In good part, we have a fairly good appreciation of it because we are all elected officials, and we can understand and appreciate the degree it takes to get elected to the House of Commons and all that is involved.

What we are talking about today are our boundaries. Contrary to what we just heard from the Bloc, every 10 years there is a boundary redistribution. When the indications came out about the numbers and the idea that Quebec could actually lose a seat, there was a great deal of concern among Liberal caucus members. There was a great deal of dialogue and an understanding. It did not take much to reach a consensus that we needed to do something about that.

We have heard from the debate thus far, whether it is New Democratic Party members or Conservative Party members, and although we have not heard from any Green Party members yet, I suspect that they also recognize it, that it is so important that we put a guarantee of 78 members for the province of Quebec in the legislation and ultimately for any other province going forward.

Even the province of Manitoba might access what we are attempting to put in today. We do not know what the population will be, but we can hope. I would like to think that on average our population in Manitoba will far exceed the average throughout the rest of Canada, but I cannot guarantee that. No one can. We do not know what the population shifts are going to be over the next number of years. We can speculate.

What provides me a level of comfort is the fact that the House of Commons, from coast to coast to coast, has recognized the importance of establishing that base for many good reasons that have been articulated, whether by the minister responsible or by the other members who have spoken thus far. If we use the province of Quebec as an example, which has really inspired us to bring forward this legislation, we need to recognize the French language and its historic significance here in Canada.

I feel very fortunate being from Winnipeg, where we have a very healthy francophone community in Saint Boniface, Winnipeg and in many rural areas such as St. Pierre Jolys. My family's roots went from Quebec to St. Pierre Jolys to Transcona Yards and, finally, to Winnipeg's north end.

At the end of the day, we have a healthy and vibrant francophone community in the province of Manitoba with, no doubt, members of Parliament, members of the Manitoba legislature and city councillors. In fact, at one point Saint Boniface was a city of its own, but things do change. Populations dictate that we need to take a look at the boundaries. There are special considerations that do need to be looked at. I will use the example of French and the francophone community, which we have recognized in the past through guarantees, such as that for Prince Edward Island that the number

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of House of Commons seats will never be fewer than what is in the Senate chamber.

● (1215)

We have it in terms of the territories, as was pointed out earlier. We have it in terms of ensuring that there is a base number that has been adjusted to take into consideration what was going to be happening in the province of Quebec, but if this legislation passes, we would address that issue.

I see that as a very strong positive. I would like to think that, if people want to support that idea and ensure we have the base for that, we should receive unanimous consent for this legislation. It will be interesting to see what my friends in the Bloc will do with this particular piece of legislation. I believe that the people of Quebec would, in fact, support the legislation, and I would encourage the Bloc to do likewise.

Elections Canada is recognized around the world as an outstanding, independent institution. In fact, Canada is respected as a very healthy and vibrant democracy. In good part, we owe it to the people of Canada and those who put their names on the ballot, whether they win or lose, and the hundreds of thousands of people who volunteer in the elections process.

All of that comes together and is organized in an apolitical fashion through Elections Canada. Every 10 years, electoral commissions are established. In Canada, we will have 10 of them, one for each province where there will be the redistribution of boundaries. They can be very significant changes. I have gone through boundary changes, both at the federal level and at the provincial level.

There is a great deal of interest from elected officials and from individuals who are looking at whether they want to run in the future as potential candidates. To the public, as a whole, community leaders will be looking and asking where their community will be after the redistribution. In most parts, we want to try to hold communities together.

For example, Tyndall Park is well-identified community in Winnipeg North and I would not want to see Tyndall Park divided. Elections commissions are able to do that more often than not. It is more of a common thing, especially in urban centres, but it is not always done. We could take a look at Winnipeg North and go to Amber Trails. A portion of Amber Trails is actually in another federal riding outside of Winnipeg North, yet it is perceived as one community at the local level.

There are restrictions and things that have to be taken into consideration. We often hear about vast, rural ridings versus highly concentrated ridings, and what sort of population bases should a representative actually have. Back in 1988, when I was first elected to the Manitoba legislature, I believe there were 26 MLAs in the city of Winnipeg and 31 MLAs in rural Manitoba. Today, if we look at it, there are 31 MLAs in the city of Winnipeg and 26 MLAs in rural Manitoba, as the city of Winnipeg has grown. We see that there is a balance that has been taken into consideration.

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If we look at the last provincial boundary redistribution, we will see that out of the 57 ridings, I believe 56 of them actually had modifications to the boundaries. The same principles apply, at least in part, where we will see some fairly significant changes to federal boundaries. After all, there are going to be some new ridings, but there is also going to be significant population shifts. Both of those have to be taken into consideration.

● (1220)

In the last federal redistribution, the map originally proposed for Winnipeg North was actually quite different from what it is today. I remember working with the Progressive Conservative member of Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul, Joy Smith, on this redistribution. We sat down and talked about how what was being proposed for Winnipeg North did not seem to make too much sense. Having two members of Parliament from different political parties work together helped when it came to the presentation to the commission, and ultimately it was changed.

I suspect a number of the presentations made to the commission were listened to. I say that because there is a process, which the minister made reference to. We know there are going to be new boundaries before the next election, and the process enables the public to have direct input, and when I say “the public”, it includes members of Parliament. The Province of Manitoba is in fact starting the process of drawing the lines for the new boundaries.

Manitoba has 14 ridings. From a percentage point of view overall in Canada, its numbers did not increase to the same degree on a per capita basis as Alberta, Ontario and B.C., so it will remain at 14 seats. I would argue that we have seven or seven and a half urban Winnipeg rural seats and six or maybe six and a half rural urban seats. I look at Kildonan—St. Paul as an urban rural seat.

I know that between the next couple of weeks and October, the independent elections commission will be looking for feedback on the boundaries that will be drawn in the coming days and weeks. The results will be published, and there will be a great deal of interest in what those new boundaries are going to look like. I anticipate that the commission will, as it has in the past, try to accommodate individuals to have in-person meetings as well as submissions of ideas and proposals.

When the final maps come out after the original drawings and consultations, they will ultimately come back to Parliament. I believe they will also go to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I would think there would be virtually no changes made. I do not know if that has been the case historically, but I suspect that the only real changes we might see once we get the final report will be of a naming nature. Members of Parliament might reflect on what they heard from the community and might find it appropriate to change the name of the constituency on the final map.

Ultimately, it will pass through the House and come into effect on a certain date. If there is no election before that date, then the new boundaries will take effect.

● (1225)

Then there are party infrastructures, political infrastructures. Political parties will have to reorganize based on the new boundaries, the 340 new ridings, and significant amounts of money will go into

those newly constituted ridings in the form of transfers from old ridings. There are all sorts of infrastructure that will need to be worked on to ensure that when the next election comes in 2025, which is at least what we are anticipating, political organizations throughout the country, whether they have elected representatives in Ottawa or not, can participate in each and every political riding. It also affords Elections Canada a way to put its machinery in place.

In other words, it is not simple to do, but it is absolutely necessary. Every 10 years, when Statistics Canada provides the census reports, we will see those significant population shifts and the growth of Canada's population overall. It is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 38 million today, whereas 10 years ago I suspect it was probably closer to 34 million. Members should not quote me on that, but I believe it was around 34 million. Where permanent residents end up landing is, generally speaking, where there will be the need to make some of the changes.

In terms of communities, I could speak of areas in my own community of Winnipeg North where there is a lot more growth. In Winnipeg, it is hard to grow in the inner city unless the growth is upward. Some cities, because of their density, are far more effective in growing upward. Examples are Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. We can see there is a need there.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Edmonton and Calgary too.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, Calgary is also one.

Part of the discussion today is about space versus density or a rural community versus a high-density urban community. It is a different type of representation. At the end of the day, there are things that have to be considered and that I believe will be considered.

The whole issue of representation has always been of interest to me. I can recall when the decision was made to reduce the size of the city of Winnipeg from 29 councillors down to 14 or 15. The idea was that if we enhance the ability of members to provide services, it helps them accommodate the growing population. Let there be no doubt that with 338 constituencies, Canada's growth in recent years of over a couple of million people, at the very least, means that the average population of constituencies is going to grow. One of the ways to compensate and ensure that members are able to provide the types of services constituents expect is to ensure that there is adequate financing for members to provide the services that are warranted.

The whole area of boundary redistribution is of great interest to us as a government, to individuals and to Canadians, because it really does matter. The bill before us today reflects the interest of parliamentarians of all political stripes, rural and urban, in recognizing the importance of Quebec retaining 78 seats. I see that as a positive thing and I hope that all members of the House will vote in favour of this legislation.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague is well aware that the House supposedly recognized the Quebec nation as a nation. If Quebec is recognized as a nation, there should be some kind of statute saying so.

The number of seats is one thing, but if the number of seats everywhere else goes up, Quebec will lose its political weight.

If a senatorial clause is good for Prince Edward Island, would my colleague agree that we could have a Quebec clause for the Quebec nation?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think the best way I can answer that is to reflect on my home province and the francophone community, which has done exceptionally well and continues to grow, and I think that it is because there is a desire from the Manitoba legislature and from all political entities. I believe the French language will always be there in a very real and tangible way, because not only members of Parliament from Quebec but members of Parliament from all regions of the country see the intrinsic value of being a bilingual nation and will continue to fight for the French language, not only in the province of Quebec but in all regions of Canada.

I believe that the more bilingual we are as a nation, the healthier we are as a nation. I do not believe that the representation in my home province of Manitoba has deterred, in any way, the growth of French and the desire to see French being spoken.

• (1235)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the government for working with us to ensure Quebec's seat count in the House of Commons remains constant. There is a lot of work to be done that we still have not done when it comes to representation. We can look around the House and see that in terms of gender balance, we have huge issues that we need to overcome, as well as in terms of participation and making sure that every vote counts.

I think about young people especially. We know that the earlier they participate in civil elections, the more they have a lifelong commitment to doing that. I go to Anne Ostwald's class often in my riding, where she teaches social justice, and they talk about issues that are important to them, such as climate justice, as we can imagine. They talk about the looming climate crisis that has impacted them. Housing, the toxic drug supply crisis and reconciliation are all important issues.

We have seen other countries, such as the U.K., Germany and Argentina, adopt a lower voting age of 16. We know how important it is to ensure those voices are heard. To ensure that young people have a seat at the table, will my colleague and will the government support a very important bill that is going to be coming up in the House, Bill C-210, tabled by my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, to lower the voting age to 16 to ensure that young people have a voice on these really critical issues?

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My son, River, is 16. He is very well informed and so are his classmates.

I hope that the hon. member and his government will consider supporting this important piece of legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, a number of years ago I actually conducted some discussion on the issue of electoral inform in the Province of Manitoba. I can recall that the issue of 16-year-olds being able to vote was raised in high school settings in the communities of Dauphin and Steinbach in Manitoba, and what really amazed me was that some of the harshest critics of allowing that to occur were the 16-year-olds, the high school students.

I think it is an interesting idea. Where it actually falls, I am not 100% sure. I do not know if the member might have already done this, but he might want to actually do some more canvassing among high school students. If we had more time, I would even welcome the opportunity to share going to a local high school, possibly here in Ottawa or even in Winnipeg, to be able to expand on that particular point, but I am open to all sorts of changes with regard to Elections Canada that would ultimately make our democracy healthier in the future.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have to be honest: I did glaze over a little, or lost focus, I should say, during part of my friend's speech. Maybe it is because I am so used to hearing him talking so much in the House. His voice puts me into a different mode.

I am kind of curious to know if my friend could answer a couple of questions for me. First, in 1991 the Supreme Court, as I am sure he is aware, made a proposal regarding proportional representation by population. Will this legislation impact this idea in any way?

What about the work that is being done already by the commissions across the country in all of the provinces? Can he explain how those will be impacted by this legislation, if at all, as well as explain the impact on the Supreme Court decision in 1991?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect the legislation will be, at least in spirit, moving toward the court decision of 1991. The member's colleague, the official opposition critic, detailed that quite well.

With respect to the second part of the question, the only impact this legislation would have on the 10 independent commissions, from what I understand, is with respect to the province of Quebec and its commission, as they will have to wait to see whether or not the bill will pass. If it passes, it will have an impact on that commission. For the rest of the nine other commissions, it should not have any impact.

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• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague—whom I have listened to ever since 2015 when I first came to the House, where he has talked up the vitality of francophone communities on the Prairies—I do have a question. If it is true that this vitality exists, notwithstanding the considerable merits of these communities, how can it be that my colleague, who bears a French name, is a unilingual anglophone now?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member is welcome to come to Winnipeg, and I am more than happy to take him around so he can get that francophone feeling. For example, we could go to École Garden Grove or École Stanley Knowles, where he will see young children speaking French, English and, in many instances, either Punjabi or Tagalog. I could take him specifically to the St. Boniface area, where he would see an enriched, strong French flavour and many monuments to Louis Riel. I know the member is very supportive of that hero. We have a Louis Riel Day. We have the Festival du Voyageur. We have all sorts of special celebrations related to our francophone heritage. I would welcome the member and be happy to drive him around to visit some of those sites if he would like.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is interesting to hear from the member for Winnipeg North. It is also interesting to hear that, although the Liberals have refused to mention the name of former prime minister Stephen Harper, they are very much endorsing the work he did when it came to the representation formula, which was not touching the formula but simply moving the floor with respect to the number of seats for each province. I am sure Prime Minister Harper is appreciating the support he is getting today from the Liberals.

My question is very simple. The Province of Alberta has made it clear, with significant precedent, that we have chosen to elect our senators. Although that is not directly related to the bill at hand, it is an important aspect of the conversation of our institutions being democratically responsive in Canada today. Can the member share if he supports the ability for provinces, whether Alberta or other provinces that choose to go down that path, to elect senators?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, what I know is that Canadians as a whole do not want to get into a constitutional debate. I believe that today the Prime Minister has put into place a system that will see truly independent senators going to the Senate. I see it as very strong positive that we are taking the partisan party politics out of the Senate, and we have seen that in the appointments the Prime Minister has made to date.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, today we are debating the bill on preserving provincial representation in the House of Commons. Understandably, this is very important to me.

Since the tabling of the 2022 budget by the NDP-Liberal government remains the focus of media attention and discussion, it is clear that very little will be said about the bill we are debating today.

However, it is important for me to share my comments and opinions on Bill C-14.

People should know that we are currently gathered to debate Bill C-14, a bill that would amend the Constitution Act, 1867 to ensure that no province will have fewer seats than it did in the 43rd Parliament, that is, the preceding Parliament, when the number of seats in the House are readjusted after each decennial census, in future years.

As we know, the House of Commons is the House of the people. It is the House of all Canadians, those from the north, south, east, west, urban areas, rural areas, from Newfoundland to British Columbia, by way of Quebec, Ontario and the Prairies. All Canadians, and I mean all, must be properly represented in the House of Commons. That is why it must be as representative as possible of all Canadian citizens—and it must also represent their differences.

On March 2, I moved a motion in the House. I asked for the unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion: “That the House oppose any federal electoral redistribution scenario that would cause Quebec or any other province or territory to lose one or more electoral districts in the future, and that the House call on the government to act accordingly.”

I have to say that Bill C-14, which we are studying today, is essentially the same as the motion we moved on March 2 and for which we sought the unanimous consent of the House. Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, that I suspect was politically driven, the former Green Party leader enthusiastically denied unanimous consent of the House for this motion. I say “enthusiastically”, because the former Green Party leader even applauded when the motion was defeated. She turned towards some of my colleagues to give a thumbs up, proud of her work. That is what happened. I saw it from where I was sitting. I was paying close attention to what was going on because there was almost unanimous support in the House to adopt this motion. Unfortunately, the leader of the Green Party chose to play politics instead of allowing the House to unanimously adopt this motion, which would have helped the government get Bill C-14 passed more quickly.

I am nevertheless pleased and happy to see the government's positive response to the motion, even though it was rejected by the Green Party. I am also happy to see that the government has presented a bill that essentially says the same thing as the motion, which is that no province, including Quebec, should lose a seat during an electoral redistribution.

Frankly, this Liberal bill retains the same redistribution formula that was created by the Fair Representation Act in 2011. In fact, I would like to point out that it was the previous Conservative government that created the legislation with the aim of making Canadian democracy more representative, adding 30 new seats to the House of Commons.

Of course, we respect the work done by the independent commissions, which work separately in each province and whose mission is to draw and readjust electoral boundaries. That is not what we are talking about today. We are not talking about boundaries, but I will come back to that because I have a message for the commissions about the redistribution of electoral boundaries in each province.

● (1245)

I think we need to look at this and consider more than one factor in determining how seats should be distributed in each province. We must provide more flexibility so that Canadian voters can be properly represented and know that their voices are being heard when their MP speaks here in the House.

The work of representation in the House is very important to Canadian democracy. This work has been under way since last October. It will make the distribution of seats more representative of Canada's population. As I said, I intend to actively participate in the process in Quebec to ensure that the voices of the people in my riding, as well as those living in the regions, are heard.

I would remind members that the process that is under way will add three new seats in Alberta, one new seat in British Columbia and one new seat in Ontario. Bill C-14 guarantees that no province or territory will lose a riding. I want to point out that, without Bill C-14, Quebec would lose a seat in the proposed electoral redistribution process. Quebec would go from 78 members to 77. That is why we chose to speak and why we wanted to move a motion to say that, in a process like this, we should not be going backwards and taking away what the provinces have gained from the beginning.

When the law was established, no one could have predicted that the population of Canada would not grow more or less evenly everywhere, in all the regions, so a minimum number of seats was allocated per province. Unless I am mistaken, that number dates back to 1985. Now, we need to update the minimum number of MPs per province, and that is what Bill C-14 will do.

I am also pleased to see that because, beyond the partisan debates, the loss of a member, or in other words a seat in the House, would have caused adverse effects and would have made the work of the electoral boundaries commissions more difficult for people in rural or more remote regions of Canada. I will talk more about this later in my speech.

As we know, every day, Canadians, in other words the voters, the people who send us here, rely on their MPs to give them answers, to respond their questions and to help them find solutions in their dealings with various federal government bodies, and sometimes even with other issues. Like all my colleagues here, I am sure, over the past two years, during this unprecedented and unexpected pandemic that has created so many problems for our constituents, I have received calls related to many subjects, including everything from employment insurance services to the Canada Revenue Agency. I have also received requests from constituents who simply did not know where else to turn, people who were in trouble because they had no money because their business had shut down and they did not know how to apply for the various assistance programs. We

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have really been there to address our constituents' requests. This is also part of our duties as members of Parliament.

To be sure, one of our main roles as MPs is to be here in the House doing our work as lawmakers, which means passing laws, making sure those laws are fit for our society, making sure we represent our constituents, and voting in accordance with our values, with what our constituents want and with what we believe is best for Canada's future. That is our main role.

Our secondary role has changed a lot over the years, and people now expect their MP to help them deal with the government and support community development and business associations to ensure they feel heard. Most MPs are very far from Ottawa. In my case, it is not so bad, because my riding is about a four-hour drive from Ottawa, five hours if I leave from one place, a little more or less if I leave from another.

● (1250)

That certainly means a lot of time on the road, but Canada is very big from coast to coast to coast. Most people are unable to get to the national capital, so that is the MP's job.

Despite technology, it is clear that many citizens have been frustrated by the lack of information or help from various departments, not to mention that replies are slow in coming, especially for things like employment insurance and Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, inquiries.

As I said, voters count on their MPs for help, support and information. For people in Canada's rural regions, their MP is often the only connection between them and the federal bureaucracy. There certainly are not employment insurance offices everywhere. There is certainly no CRA office or representative in every Canadian community. That is why MPs are working more and more closely with their constituents.

I would say that there was a big difference during the pandemic. Before, people would come to their MP's office, often for passports and occasionally for problems with EI. Many, many people who were in need of these services during the pandemic discovered their MP's office. Although the programs are now over, people are still coming to the MP's office, which is wonderful. However, we cannot have a situation where the MP's office becomes inaccessible because it is overwhelmed by too many requests or because the riding is so big that people are too far away from their MP and cannot reach them quickly.

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Connection is important. Reducing the number of MPs in a province would diminish this relationship between constituents and their MP. There definitely needs to be standards and rules in place for determining the number of MPs. However, it is important to highlight the difference between MPs from urban regions and those from rural regions, including the distance that some have to cover and the number of municipalities they represent in the House.

At the end of the day, Quebec is currently the only province that will see a change under the proposed redistribution. That is where Bill C-14 comes in. It will give the Quebec electoral redistribution commission greater latitude to do its work and propose a new electoral map. I hope that during this review, some thought will be given not only to population, but also to geography. I will come back to that.

As the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, I represent a riding with the same number of voters as a riding in Montreal, but I have to cover an area that is 500 times larger than a riding in a big city. In my riding alone, there are 50 municipalities that I must serve. That means 50 mayors and 50 municipal councils. There are two, three, four or even five times that number of social clubs, not to mention chambers of commerce, business associations, agricultural associations and other groups. All these people want to have access to their MP and want to talk to me.

In a large riding, the MP will be dealing with 50 times the number of groups. For example, MPs for the Quebec City region only have one mayor to deal with. I have 50, and they are all important to me. The mayor of a municipality with 200 people is just as important as the mayor of a municipality with 26,000 people. I have to be just as present for the mayor of a small municipality as for the mayors of big cities. It is very time consuming.

How can MPs in the regions be more effective and do a better job if this difference is not taken into consideration?

• (1255)

If 20 municipalities are added to my riding during this process, it will be nearly impossible to meet all 70 or so mayors and municipal councils. Since each municipal council meets at least once a month, I will not have enough time in a year to meet all of the municipal councils. This ultimately severs the connections between the MP, the federal government and our constituents.

How are we meant to properly follow up on their issues or on all of the projects that councils and residents present to us? To ask that question is to answer it.

The bigger the rural ridings get, the less access these constituents have to their MP. Some might say that this is natural, but I disagree. As I said earlier, the people in our regions do not have direct access to federal government services. Their only point of access is the constituency office.

I hope that the commission that will be responsible for reviewing the electoral boundaries, which will soon be working in Quebec, will take the representation of the regions in Canada into account.

Keep in mind that there is some latitude in the act to allow for a discrepancy between the ridings' average population and what will ultimately be applied. I am not asking that the act be changed, sim-

ply that this flexibility be applied as much as possible so that the rural reality is taken into account when electoral maps are being redrawn. This is important, and it is being done. The Constitution itself recognizes this concept, having already established a minimum number of members for each province, despite the fact that some have fewer residents. That is the reality.

Without Bill C-14, there would have been less latitude for the Quebec commission, which would have had to search high and low for citizens no longer in ridings in order to take a seat away from Quebec. This is unacceptable.

A member of Parliament is like a family doctor. It is not that we save lives, because I would not want anyone to think I am comparing myself to a doctor by any means, but, when there are too many patients, it is hard to get an appointment and that is, unfortunately, what is likely to happen if we add in distances and all the rest.

Since the spring of 2020, more and more people have been using platforms such as Zoom, Teams and FaceTime. It may have revolutionized communications. We can indeed have more meetings. I have had more opportunities than ever to meet with town councils because we have this new way of doing things. I use this technology, but there is nothing like a good old-fashioned face-to-face meeting that gives people a chance to talk and really communicate.

To ensure that MPs can represent their constituencies well and do their job in rural ridings that keep getting bigger, the concept of rurality must be part of the electoral boundary redistribution process. Any change to the electoral map that does not take into account geography, demographics, the people's needs, culture and who we are will have an impact on democracy.

I am proud of our regions. I grew up and still live in a region, where I have chosen to stay. It is in my DNA. I was the mayor of a town in the regions, Thetford Mines. I was involved in all kinds of associations, and I have always considered connections between each level of government, municipal, provincial and federal, to be extremely important.

It is very important to maintain our voices in the House of Commons and to ensure that we can keep accessing the people who can help us and help our voters deal with the giant federal machine even when they do not necessarily have direct access to federal government services close to home in each of our ridings.

• (1300)

I am pleased to see that Quebec will not be losing any seats. I am also happy to say that we will be supporting Bill C-14. However, the work has only just begun.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has been very positive in his words with regard to Bill C-14, and we look forward to seeing its passage. I am somewhat curious about recognizing the importance of timing, because there is a timing element to this. As I said, I believe Manitoba and maybe a couple of provinces are already starting to draw their boundaries, with the idea of providing a report and allowing for public consultation all the way up to October.

The quicker the legislation passes, no doubt the easier it will be for Quebec's electoral commission. I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts on when he would ultimately like to see the bill pass.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question, to which I would reply that responsibility for the progress of parliamentary work in the House lies with the government and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I hope the government will do everything it can to ensure that this bill is passed very quickly, so that we can then work with the Commission de la représentation électorale du Québec.

The parliamentary secretary should put that question to his colleague right in front of him. This would give us an idea of the importance he wants to attach to the passage of Bill C-14.

• (1305)

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, last spring, my colleague, who is a member from Quebec, voted in favour of the Bloc motion recognizing Quebec as a nation with French as its only official language.

The Bloc Québécois believes that if Quebec is a nation, it should have special political weight to protect its specificity. Under this bill, Quebec will be allowed to keep 78 seats but, unfortunately, that will be out of a total of 343. Its political weight in this federation will therefore drop from 23.7% to 22.74%.

As a Quebecker, how can my colleague accept this drop in Quebec's political weight?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, my Bloc Québécois colleague's question is very important. I sincerely think that we need to be having these discussions in the House.

I remember that a similar proposal was made in the context of an accord, the Charlottetown accord. A 25% minimum representation was proposed at the time.

I did some research and looked into what the position of the Bloc Québécois and its leaders was at the time with respect to that accord, which sought to maintain a minimum representation of 25%. I discovered that the Bloc's position at the time was to vote against the accord.

Today I am being lectured, but in the past there was an attempt to maintain this 25% representation and the Bloc contributed to the defeat of that accord. I think that some of my colleagues should do their homework and do some research. They should see the cita-

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tions I have in front of me. I would be happy to share them with everyone, but I will restrain myself because I am very happy that Quebec will be able to keep 78 MPs for now.

If we want to open a new constitutional debate, it is up to the House. I hope that the Bloc Québécois will think about it this time before making decisions based only on preventing the Canadian confederation from working.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech was very interesting.

[English]

Unfortunately, my French is not up to the question I would like to ask him, so I will switch to English.

He spoke a lot about electoral representation, which is of course why we are here today. I will say that in my province of Alberta, we are expecting to receive three more seats. However, in the last election, in Alberta, 65% of the people voted for the Conservative Party but 97% of the seats are Conservative. In Saskatchewan, only 64% voted for the Conservative Party and it has 100% of the seats. In Canada as a whole, 51% of Canadians did not get a representative they voted for.

I wonder if the member could speak a bit about the value of us looking at proportional representation. The Liberals did promise this in 2015 but did not deliver on it. I wonder if he could speak about how that would help electoral representation.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I will start on a positive note and congratulate my colleague on her French. She has spoken in French a few times in the House, and her French is better than she thinks. She should speak French more often.

Now for the negative. If the NDP was truly serious about wanting proportional representation, why did they not include it in their agreement with the Liberal government? That is what I am wondering.

It is now essentially one party. Why do they not sit down right now with the Prime Minister and ask him to start over, to make the same promise, the promise he did not keep when he realized it would probably put him at a disadvantage? That benefited one person.

I think that the NDP forgot this small but very important element in its negotiations with the Liberal Party. This afternoon, at 4 p.m., when the budget is tabled, it will be obvious who bought whom in the secret agreement between the NDP and the Liberals.

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• (1310)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am curious to know where my colleague stands on capping the number of seats in the House. Seats are added every 10 years, but what does he think about adding seats to the House?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, my colleague asked an excellent question.

One day, we will have to think about the maximum number of members in the House. Some legislatures have done so, and I think that we will likely have to do that one day. I very much want to participate in that debate, always keeping in mind the best interests of the voters who send us here to Ottawa to represent them and the work we must do to represent them properly. That said, I do not see how we would be able to have 600 members here if Canada's population were to grow that much.

For now, though, it is important to at least maintain the same number of seats and then eventually settle on a maximum number. We are not there yet, since we have not had the necessary debates. Canadians will have to be involved in the debate. It cannot be held just here in the House.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always it is great to be able to enter into debate. I appreciate very much how my colleague from Quebec outlined the importance of members of Parliament, and of our offices in particular. I know I can compliment not only my staff, but the staff of every member of Parliament across this country who worked significant hours at a time when many government offices, such as Service Canada and whatnot, were closed down. Speaking from my experience and the experience of my office, my office received thousands of calls from people who were desperate for help.

There is an interesting dynamic that exists between rural Canada and many parts of urban Canada. I know it is about five or six hours from corner to corner of my constituency, and I know my colleague from Quebec represents thousands of square kilometres. I am not sure exactly how many thousands.

Would he be able to expand on that unique dynamic that exists, to ensure that we have fair representation that includes the difference between rural and urban?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I recognize that there are some ridings that are much bigger than my own. My colleague's riding of Battle River—Crowfoot is a huge one.

I do not want to be misinterpreted. I am not saying that MPs in big cities work any less. All I am saying is that their work is very different. In ridings like ours, a single meeting can take four hours, so we can talk with a single constituent. That representation is very different for someone in a big city where everything is about an hour from the constituency office. That is a big difference.

This is what the provincial commissions will have to consider when they propose new electoral boundaries. We must use this latitude to make it easier for constituents in rural ridings to access their MP, and I think the existing commissions have that flexibility. The

act does not need to be changed; we simply need to make use of the freedom and latitude it already offers.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about Bill C-14, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 regarding electoral representation.

As the member for Calgary Shepard mentioned, this is a bit of an “inside baseball” bill, in the sense that the bill itself and its implications are relatively simple, yet important. I am going to use my time today to talk about the bill, the reasons behind it, and other political implications and choices related to representation.

Every 10 years, the Chief Electoral Officer reviews demographic changes and allocates the number of seats for each province. He determines whether electoral boundaries should be readjusted to reflect population shifts within a province. Section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867 sets out the formula for the distribution of seats in the House of Commons among the provinces after each decennial census. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act provides for drawing the boundaries of electoral districts in each province.

Electoral boundaries must be readjusted whenever a province's representation changes, or when there have been significant population fluctuations in a province, such as a shift from rural to urban areas. The redistribution of electoral boundaries is a federal matter controlled by Parliament.

In October 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer, based on population trends over the past 10 years, set the distribution of seats. The number of seats in the House of Commons was increased from 338 to 342, with British Columbia and Ontario gaining one seat each, Alberta gaining three and Quebec losing one.

• (1315)

[English]

This legislation being introduced today amends that decision, as is the ability of Parliament, by creating a constitutional floor: The number of seats any province or territory had in the 43rd election will be the new constitutional floor. The practice of maintaining a certain number of seats in the House of Commons for provinces whose populations were declining in comparison to the national average has been done before.

First, in 1914, the senatorial clause was introduced to ensure that no province would ever have fewer members of Parliament than its number of senators. The second constitutional protection is what is known as the grandfather clause, which came into effect under the Representation Act of 1985. It amended the formula for determining seats and guaranteed that, regardless of what the population of a province or territory might be in the future, it would be constitutionally protected by having no fewer than the seats it had in the House of Commons in 1986.

[Translation]

I should add that a series of adjustments were made between 1914 and 1986 to protect and attempt to ensure equal treatment of the provinces and territories. Initially, the total number of seats was calculated by dividing the population of each province by a fixed number called the electoral quotient, which was itself calculated by dividing the population of the province of Quebec by 65.

[English]

The one exclusion to this was called “the one-twentieth rule”, under which no province could lose seats in electoral redistribution unless its share of the national population had decreased by at least 5%, or one twentieth, between the last two censuses. This was appealed in 1946 on the basis of Quebec's desire for representation by population. I may just add that I find it a bit ironic today that we are here debating and driving legislation that would have been a completely different narrative from what those Quebec MPs would have taken in 1940.

All members of Parliament go and research before we come before the House to talk about the principles of the legislation before us. I want to give a tip of the cap to the folks in the House of Commons who have a very detailed history of electoral redistribution and the dynamic of how the number of seats in the House of Commons has changed over time. I give a tip of the cap to the researchers and the folks involved with the House of Commons.

● (1320)

[Translation]

This bill simply does what has already been done many times, which is amend the formula in the Constitution to grandfather the number of seats that existed during the 2021 election. We have already had debates during this session about the possibility of Quebec losing a seat. There seemed to be a consensus about the importance of Quebec's representation and the preservation of its language, culture and identity within Canada.

I am not opposed to the legislation before us, but I want to take this opportunity to put it on the record that I have concerns about the number of MPs that will be added to the House of Commons and to speak to Bill C-246.

[English]

I asked this of the last Conservative member when I stood to ask a question on his remarks. At what point do we consider limiting the number of seats in the House of Commons? I did some research coming into this and found that, historically over time, there was contemplation that by 2001 we would have 400 members of Parliament. Today, we have 338. It is an open question that will inevitably have to be explored beyond the physical dynamics of the House of Commons and how many members of Parliament we can have in this space. It will also be about parliamentary privilege, and allowing individuals to have the space to bring forward issues to debate. Sometimes it is crowded to get on the agenda and to bring remarks forward in this place, because members of Parliament are doing that job.

It is interesting. Right now, in the House of Commons in the U.K., there are 650 members of Parliament. Is that something we

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want to see in Canada? Is that something that Canadians expect? I do not have the answer, but I pose it as a question here today. It also has a dynamic for how Parliament works. Relatively, when a government forms, whether it be a minority or a majority situation, there might be 150-odd members of Parliament in the government caucus or maybe just over 170, in today's dynamic. If there all of a sudden were 300 government caucus MPs, what would that mean for the dynamic in terms of independence for members of Parliament, their ability to speak and their ability to support the government, but also their ability to bring forward important issues? When we look at how the House of Commons operates in London, there are similarities to here but there are also differences. I raise that for consideration.

I also want to talk about rural members of Parliament. I have a riding that I am very proud to represent. It is 5,000 square kilometres. It is by no means small, but I consider myself lucky compared with other members of Parliament. My good friend in Central Nova has about 10,000 square kilometres to cover. My hon. colleague for Bonaville—Burin—Trinity has a 16,000-square-kilometre riding. That is a lot of territory to cover. We have to be mindful, with respect to all of the electoral redistribution, of the point at which a member of Parliament just becomes too far stretched to adequately represent the communities they are expected to represent in this place, in terms of their presence in the riding, their ability to connect and their ability to physically drive or travel.

Indeed, I have given a couple of examples. I know there are even more challenging circumstances for other members of Parliament, particularly in northern Canada as well.

I want to talk about Nova Scotia's proportionate share. Indeed, I have a colleague beside me from Newfoundland and Labrador. I have the member for Malpeque, Prince Edward Island, as well. As we continue to add seats in this place, yes, some provinces are protected constitutionally in the number of members of Parliament that they will have in the House. In Nova Scotia's example, we will never have any less than 11 members of Parliament, but 11 members of Parliament out of 338 is a certain dynamic and 11 members among 500 members of Parliament is a much smaller proportionate share of the voice that we can bring forward as a province in this dynamic.

We had an opposition day motion from the Bloc Québécois, and I will take the opportunity to speak to Bill C-246 in a moment. The Bloc and the House were strong on maintaining the seats, but they want to make sure that 25% of the House of Commons seats would always be preserved for Quebec. My question is, and I have said it to the Bloc, why do we not look at capping eventually, maybe to 360, 380, or 400? Let us actually look at eventually capping the number of members of Parliament in the House of Commons. Every province and territory in this country has their constitutional protections in force. This would allow there to be a stable footing for some of the things we have talked about.

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Yes, the Bloc members want 25%, but as I pointed out to them, if they would have pushed to say let us cap it at 350 members of Parliament, they would have their constitutional floor from today's legislation, assuming it passes, which I am confident it will. They would have been protected at 22%, and that could have been a way to ensure that we do preserve Quebec language, culture and the unique identity within Canada.

I want to speak to Bill C-246. The member of Parliament for Drummond has brought this forward. In essence it not only protects Quebec's 78 seats, but also mandates a requirement that Quebec never have any less than 25% of a proportion of the seats in the House of Commons, regardless of what happens and regardless of the population of the province.

To my sovereignist colleagues across the way, their job is not to protect the identity of Canada. Indeed, they want to separate from Canada, so I would never expect them to do something that is actually beneficial for bringing Canadians together. In fact, sometimes I would argue they would like to wedge and drive divisions in Canada, but we have to understand what this actually represents.

This would not just be a change that could be done within Parliament. This would require a constitutional amendment that would mean a 7/50 formula. For those Canadians who are at home and wondering what the heck the 7/50 is, it essentially means that on constitutional changes such as this, we would have to get the approval of seven of 10 provinces that represent at least 50% of the Canadian population. That is a very high threshold to be able to achieve. That is what we expect to be the legal standard on Bill C-246 if it were to move forward. It is an open question about whether it will, but again in principle, this is problematic.

That type of bill would open up a lot of division in this country, and I think we are all standing here today recognizing Quebec's unique identity within Canada. I do not want to say we are all committed, but I know on this side of the House we are committed to keeping 78 seats in Quebec. In fact, we are protecting everyone right now with a new constitutional floor on the basis of population in 2021, including in Nova Scotia.

Again, this is a continuation of where we already were, but the idea of saying absolutely, regardless of population, despite population decline, they will get 25%, is not ever going to work in this country. It will never pass. It is being introduced in a way to create divide and to try to, I would argue, re-establish the argument about separation in Quebec, which frankly, the Bloc Québécois will know right now is not really high on the agenda, but they are trying to drive that type of narrative.

• (1325)

I think this Parliament understands the importance of Quebec and its political representation in this place. As I have said before, looking at the number of cabinet ministers and their influence, whether they be the Prime Minister or key ministers in the government, Quebec plays an important role in the government of Canada, in this place and, indeed, within the country.

I want to make sure that all members of Parliament get the opportunity to speak on this. It was an absolute privilege to be able to do some of the research and look into the legislation.

I will just take an opportunity to thank the minister of intergovernmental affairs for bringing this forward. He, of course, also holds the portfolio of the minister for communities and infrastructure. What a tremendous job to balance two very difficult portfolios, so I thank him on the record for his leadership within the government and for his continued advocacy for the people of Beauséjour. I do believe that he is going on 20-plus years in Parliament, which is, I think, a tremendous commitment to public service.

Of course, my predecessor Scott Brison also served for 21 years in this place. It shows that these individuals are committed to making a difference for their constituents, Canada and the world.

I look forward to taking questions from my colleagues, who I watched today as they listened with utmost curiosity, having detailed questions for me to answer in just a moment.

• (1330)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are a few points on which I actually completely agree with my colleague from across the way, one being that we very often wonder what the motivation is for our sovereignist colleagues in the House, although we know what their motivation is. However, I also want to mention that the House of Commons truly is the people's chamber, and it should be representative of the population across the country. I have said that in a number of my interventions in debates, that this is the House. It is the people's House and the 338 members of Parliament who have been elected to represent those electors carry the voice of those electors to this House. This House should represent the population of our country.

I want to ask my hon. colleague if he is aware of whether the provinces with the fastest growing populations, such as my province of British Columbia, and Alberta and Ontario, were consulted. Far too often we hear, when we are on the doorsteps during elections, that the election is over by the time it gets to the western provinces. Were those provinces consulted?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I would not pretend to speak for the minister of intergovernmental affairs in terms of the work that was undertaken. We had the opportunity in this House to debate an opposition day motion, and I know a number of Conservative colleagues and, indeed, everyone has had the chance to speak to it.

The member raised an important point about how we balance representation. I would submit to this House that there has never been a true representation by population, and that has always been because Canada was a compromise from day one in 1867. Even as we added provinces during Confederation, and as the member opposite's province joined, which I believe was in 1870, there was a negotiation about what was fair and equitable at the time.

I do not think there has ever been pure representation by population. Certainly, sitting as a member of Parliament with 11 seats in Nova Scotia, I think we would be closer to 8 or 9 without it. I really want to make sure that all regions of the country have a voice with representation. I think today's legislation and where we are is fair and equitable at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, we often hear the argument that Quebec is well represented because we have the Prime Minister and ministers.

I would simply like to point out to my colleague that the Island of Montreal is experiencing a serious housing crisis, with 25,000 people waiting for low-income housing. However, the Island of Montreal is represented by the Prime Minister and six senior ministers, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Canadian Heritage. This is significant, but despite this, the crisis has continued for seven years, so having ministers is not the answer to everything.

I want to talk about the French language. My colleague must be sensitive to this in Nova Scotia. According to the numbers, the status of French in Quebec is so precarious that the percentage of people whose mother tongue is French may drop to just 69% by 2036, which might as well be tomorrow. If we do not use this bill as an opportunity to protect our political weight, if we do not stand up for ourselves, we will never be able to protect the French language. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, first of all, I agree that policies must be adopted to preserve the French language. That is why I try very hard to speak French here and to learn the language. Policies favouring francophone immigration are also very important, not only in Quebec, but also outside Quebec, elsewhere in Canada, to preserve the French language.

With regard to what my colleague said about ministers and the problems in Montreal, my answer is simple. The Legault government and many of the MNAs have a hand in this, but I think some other social problems are at play, and opportunities do exist. I find that part of the question a little odd.

• (1335)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, this bill protects the number of seats not only in Quebec, but also in all the other provinces. How important does the member think this is for his own province?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and for using French in the House.

Of course the legislation is neutral in the sense that all of the provinces and territories are reflected in the Constitution. To me the question that remains is this. How many members will be added to the House?

For Nova Scotia, 11 members are protected by the Constitution, but having just 11 members out of 500 in the House would reduce the proportion of representation we have in the House.

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I think that in future we will have to determine the number of MPs in the House of Commons both from a parliamentary privilege perspective and a logistics perspective.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know my hon. colleague has been an advocate here in this House. I want to mention that I come from a riding that represents over 100,000 square kilometres. Could the member consider that and think about what it is like to overlap with over 500 other elected representatives, whether they are MLAs, town councillors, county councillors or band councils? It is something.

There is representation by responsibility. Trying to simultaneously get funding for five pools and recreation centres is a major challenge. It is an interesting discussion.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, a tip of the cap to the member, as I have 5,000 square kilometres and that makes me look like small peanuts compared to the member opposite is dealing with. I salute him and can appreciate how difficult those challenges are.

As I mentioned in my speech, I believe this is a very important point about the rurality of our country and ensuring that members of Parliament who are expected to represent these areas can do so adequately. I think it is an open question, notwithstanding calling this member's advocacy into question, on the actual size. As he mentioned, working with 500 elected officials is extremely challenging.

I want to separate the conversation around the amount of seats within a province or territory versus how we actually distribute within those provinces. As we see migration of larger numbers in urban areas, perhaps urban MPs will have to take on a larger proportion of constituents so we can make some of these rural ridings smaller geographically to make sure there is that equity.

Right now, I know, for example, in Nova Scotia, and I do not pretend to know the federal aspect, there is a proportion of variance that is allowed when we look at these different elements. Perhaps that has to be extended even further to allow urban areas to have more constituents in a smaller place, and then also allow people, like this member, to have a more reasonable size and scope of geography to cover.

• (1340)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for working with us to ensure Quebec's seat count in the House of Commons remains constant. Clearly there is a lot of work to do, especially around representation. We can look at gender balance and the important work that needs to be done to address that, as well as participation in our electoral system. We know the Liberal government ran on a platform in 2015 to make it the last unfair election. It still has not implemented a proportional system, and as a result, we still have lower turnout.

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One thing I think about is young people. We are talking about really important issues critical to them such as climate justice, reconciliation, overdoses and the toxic drug supply crisis that is claiming lives in our country. We know that the younger people participate in elections and are involved in civic participation, they have a life-long commitment to it. We have seen Austria, Germany and the U.K. lower the voting age to 16.

Does my colleague agree that if someone can drive, work and pay taxes, all of which can be done in this country at age 16, they should be able to vote? My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley has put forward a bill to the House, Bill C-210. Will he be supporting that bill, which is a very important bill, to lower the voting age to 16? We know people who are 16 in this country, who are contributing to this country and whose futures are at stake, need a seat at the table.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, there were a lot of different elements in the commentary.

First of all, around first past the post, the election commitment in 2015 was about its being the last election by first past the post. My understanding, although I was not here in the 42nd Parliament, is that there was the idea of doing a ranked ballot. The NDP rejected that offer, so it is a bit rich for that member to step up and suggest the government did not put something on the table to be able to make a change.

I want to address the question that is fundamental, which is the voting age at 16. I am one of the youngest members of Parliament in the House. I try every day, as part of engaging individuals in my riding, to engage with youth. It is important to make sure they have an understanding of the democratic process. Indeed, some of the issues we are talking about today will have profound impacts on them as they become adults and move forward. In principle, I support moving it toward the age of 16. I look forward to reviewing Bill C-210 and speaking to that later in this session.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

I rise to speak on Bill C-14, an act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867. More specifically, what this bill would do is amend what is known as the grandfather clause. By way of background, the grandfather clause has been part of our Constitution since 1867, with the passage of the Representation Act, 1985. Very simply, what the grandfather clause does is establish a floor in terms of the allocation of seats by province in terms of the redistribution process that takes place every 10 years. The floor that the grandfather clause sets is that no province shall be allocated fewer seats in future redistributions than that province had in 1985.

Bill C-14 is a fairly straightforward piece of legislation in that it amends the grandfather clause by establishing an updated floor, a floor of 2015 as opposed to 1985. More specifically, it would ensure that no province will receive an allocation of fewer seats than that province had in 2015, in the 43rd Parliament, in any future redistribution. What that means for my province of Alberta is that it increases the floor in terms of the minimal number of seats that Alberta will be allocated in any redistribution by 13, the 13 seats that Alberta gained between 1985 and 2015.

When we look at the issue of allocating seats across Canada, a foundational principle of our democratic process is representation by population. Representation by population is based upon the notion that the weight attached to the vote of each Canadian should be equal, regardless of what region of Canada they live in. It is a principle that was adopted by the fathers of Confederation in 1867, and it is a principle that is enshrined in our Constitution.

While it is a principle that is foundational, achieving pure representation by population is not practical. Indeed, it is not entirely desirable in regard to a number of factors, including the vastness of Canada. With respect to the impracticability of achieving pure representation by population, one need look no further than our Constitution. For example, the senatorial clause of 1915 guarantees that every province shall have at least the same number of seats in the House of Commons as it has senators. That is why, for example, the province of Prince Edward Island is guaranteed four seats in the House of Commons because it has four senators, notwithstanding the fact that the province of Prince Edward Island has fewer than 160,000 people.

Indeed, my riding of St. Albert—Edmonton is almost as large as Prince Edward Island. My friend and colleague down the road in Edmonton—Wetaskiwin represents a riding of more than 200,000 people, 40,000 or 50,000 more people than Prince Edward Island. One might say to simply rescind or repeal the senatorial clause, but of course that requires the unanimous consent of the provinces. Prince Edward Island, I am sure, will be in no hurry to offer its consent.

● (1345)

Achieving pure representation by population is not practicable, but it is also important to take into account what the Supreme Court of Canada provided for in the Saskatchewan boundaries reference case of 1991. That case dealt with the boundary redistribution in the province of Saskatchewan that tended to disproportionately favour rural areas at the expense of more populous urban areas. The court looked at section 3 of the charter, which guarantees the right of every Canadian to vote, and in the context of the redistribution of boundaries in the province of Saskatchewan, the Supreme Court determined that the overriding principle is one of effective representation.

In terms of effective representation, the court recognized such factors as geography, communities of interest and so on. However, that being said, the court did stress the importance of representation by population. To that end, I would cite Madam Justice McLachlin, who said:

What are the conditions of effective representation? The first is relative parity of voting power. A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted.

In order to have effective representation, what we must have, to the greatest degree possible, is representation by population. That is where we have moved significantly towards, thanks to the leadership of Prime Minister Harper and the previous Conservative government with the passage of the Fair Representation Act.

The Fair Representation Act replaced the 1985 formula that established an electoral quotient, which is the first step in terms of determining the allocation of seats, with a new formula that sets a new electoral quotient. The problem, very simply, with the 1985 formula is that, although it was thought to be fair in 1985, it did not allow for the allocation of seats by province to keep up with population growth among the fastest-growing provinces. As a result, the fastest-growing provinces were denied their right to fair, proportionate representation in the House of Commons. It created, over time, a representation gap.

Take, for example, my province of Alberta. Alberta gained nearly one million people between 1988 and 2004, yet in the span of nearly 20 years with one million new Albertans, Alberta only gained two seats in the House of Commons. So significant was the representation gap at the time that the Fair Representation Act was introduced, some analysis established that the three fastest-growing provinces in Canada, namely Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, were among the most under-represented provinces or states in the industrialized world, according to analysis at the time from the Mowat Centre.

The Fair Representation Act addressed the representation gap significantly by establishing a new formula that better takes into account population growth, all the while respecting the overriding principle of effective representation. What that has meant in the last two redistributions is an increase in representation for the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

• (1350)

My province of Alberta has gained nine seats in the span of 10 years. Ontario gained 18 seats in the first redistribution. The province of British Columbia gained eight seats. That gap is being closed thanks to the legacy of Prime Minister Harper and the formula provided in the Fair Representation Act.

In closing, I will say that this legislation, I am pleased to see, would not in any major way impact the Harper formula. It would maintain the Harper formula, and in that regard it maintains a significant step forward in achieving something much closer to representation by population, which the Supreme Court has said is essential for having effective representation.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague and I may not always agree on discussion points and politics, but I do respect his ability to stand before the House without notes to recite his speeches and bring forward his points.

I just had a Q and A with the member of Parliament for Peace River—Westlock, my hon. colleague's colleague, about the rurality of the country and the fact that his riding is 100,000 square kilometres. He talked about effective representation, and we talked about the challenges, of course, notwithstanding the fact that there has been a rural-urban shift. It is important to take into consideration those elements so that rural MPs can still represent their constituents in a reasonable fashion.

Would the member agree that with the current structure, when we look at the dynamic within the provinces and territories, we have to make sure that rural representation remains an important piece, par-

ticularly with the size and geography of federal ridings at this point?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, in short, I absolutely concur with my colleague from Kings—Hants that we need to take into allowance issues of population and geography, as my friend, the member for Peace River—Westlock, outlined. He represents 100,000 square kilometres, an area that comprises 500 municipal, provincial and band officials, and that is taken into account in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. It takes into account the factors the Supreme Court specifically cited in the Saskatchewan reference case in terms of establishing and maintaining effective representation.

• (1355)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague's intervention today was very detailed and fact-based, and I appreciate his attention to detail.

He talked about the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin having 200,000 constituents in his riding, and something I have been thinking a lot about is the nature of representation when we look at the difference between rural and urban. I wonder if the member would be able to speak to that. Considering the difference in priorities and the different challenges that rural and urban ridings face, would he be interested in making sure, as we determine the three new seats in Alberta, that we have urban and rural priorities in line?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton is quite right when she speaks of the Edmonton—Wetaskiwin riding, which takes in the deep south of suburban Edmonton and has a farming and small-town component. That is something the boundaries commission of each province takes into account among the factors they consider in drawing boundaries, including having regard for communities of interest. They are ensuring, to the greatest degree possible, that the boundaries of each riding align with communities of interest, and at the same time, they are trying to maintain, as best as possible, roughly equal population sizes.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to expand on the question from the previous member. When I look at Toronto, we have more than 20 members representing a riding that, arguably, as I have driven from one side of it to the other, is not that different.

Is there a question we should be asking at this time about that? Certainly we need more people to support that many individuals regarding services, but do we really need that many members?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, that is a good question from my friend, the member for Sarnia—Lambton. There are different challenges that members of Parliament face in representing urban and rural areas. They are taken into account, having regard for additional resources for the members who represent larger ridings by population and by virtue of their geography. However, I underscore that when we allocate seats and draw boundaries, the principle that must be respected to the greatest degree possible is representation by population.

Statements by Members

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are discussing representation in the House, and I talked earlier about the important work we need to do on gender balance and proportionality. I talked a lot about young people and the lack of opportunities for them to have a seat at the table. We know that at 16 years old, young people can drive a car, work and pay taxes in this country. We also know that if they participate at a young age, they have a better chance of voting in the future.

As to my question for my colleague, there is a bill before the House, Bill C-210, tabled by my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley. Does the member support allowing those who can drive—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order, please. We need to hear the question.

The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, let me say, in short, that I believe in principle that the voting age of 18 is the most appropriate age. However, I do look forward to debate on the bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, today, April 7, is World Health Day. The World Health Organization has asked that this year we focus on planetary health, which is a good idea. We have a planetary health doctor, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, which gave us all a prescription on Monday and really clear, good health advice. If we want to be healthy, cut out the bad things and cut down on the smoking.

Oh, but the Government of Canada did not like that prescription, not one bit. We have our own quack, apparently. We have our own snake oil remedies. We do not want to cut down; we want to double down, on the smoking, on the Bay Du Nord, on the Trans Mountain pipeline. We are not paying attention to what the planetary health doctor is telling us to do. We will make money smoking. We have enough investments in the cigarette companies. We can use that money to get to net health by 2050. Yes, indeed, we will ignore the health advice to save our planet and it will—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Before I call on the next speaker, can I please have some quiet? We can barely hear what is being said in the chamber. There is an issue with the outside lobby, so I would really appreciate it if people kept quiet.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

LYLE CRUICKSHANK

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Montreal's West Island has lost a true gentleman and man

of integrity who contributed in so many meaningful ways to community and country. Lyle Cruickshank's early work as an educator was followed by a lengthy career supporting the development of Canadian culture with the National Film Board. A pillar of community life, he served three terms on Beaconsfield's city council.

A faithful member of the Beaurepaire United Church, Lyle was the inspiration and life force behind Villa Beaurepaire, a church-sponsored project to build a non-profit affordable residence for autonomous seniors that has become a vibrant community in its own right. Last month, I had the pleasure of accompanying our Minister for Seniors, the member for Brampton West, on a visit to this extraordinary model of independent senior living.

I ask members to join me in sending our heartfelt condolences to Lyle's wife Susan and children Paula, Devon and Ian.

[Translation]

LEUCAN SHAVED HEAD CHALLENGE

Mr. Bernard Génèreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, April is cancer awareness month. I was very happy to become the honorary co-chair of the 2022 Leucan shaved head challenge in the Montmagny region together with Jean-Philippe Dumas, sales manager at Planchers Mercier.

This important annual event is an opportunity to raise awareness of the fact that our children also experience health problems. Leucan provides services tailored specifically to children with cancer and their families and also conducts clinical research. Recently I was profoundly affected by the health problems of my grandson Oskar. I understand the difficulties and hardships experienced by families with children who are ill.

Our campaign accepts donations, and we have set an ambitious goal of raising \$100,000.

I invite the Speaker to support me by agreeing to shave his head. I will be shaving mine at the Café Bistro Au Coin du Monde in Montmagny on June 18.

Mr. Speaker, you do not have a lot of hair, but you would be shaving it for a worthwhile cause.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe we have the same hairdo.

The hon. member for Brampton North.

*Statements by Members**[English]***SIKH HERITAGE MONTH**

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Sikh Heritage Month and April 14 marks the day of Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi is a special day for Sikh people, as it signifies the beginning of the Khalsa Panth created by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who initiated the Khalsa as warriors designated to be the protectors of the innocent. Sikhi teaches us the importance of justice, equality and service to others.

On this occasion, I would like to recognize the outstanding work of Khalsa Aid Canada, an organization that highlights and practises these important teachings. Khalsa Aid responded rapidly to the crisis in Ukraine and established relief teams in five countries bordering Ukraine. Recently, at the Ukraine-Poland border, my friend Gurpartap Singh Toor and a team of young volunteers from Canada provided langar seva. They provided up to 5,000 free meals a day, along with emotional support, to escaping Ukrainians in one of the largest refugee camps in Europe today.

I want to thank these volunteers and the Sikh Canadians who are living up to their Sikh values and making contributions.

Happy Vaisakhi. *Vaisakhi diyan lakh lakh Vadhaiyan.*

* * *

● (1405)

*[Translation]***NICOLE THAUVETTE**

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am excited to rise today to congratulate Nicole Thauvette on winning the “Don Quichotte” award, which recognizes individuals who are working hard to build a better, fairer and more humane world.

Nicole Thauvette, an amazing woman from Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Quebec, embodies those goals. Nicole is a smart woman with an intrinsic drive to improve our community, one heart at a time.

This award reflects the kindness she shows everyone around her and her commitment to helping those who are often forgotten. She is being overwhelmed by a huge wave of love today, but it is well deserved, given the laughter she spreads to everyone around her, the bursts of creativity and freedom she inspires, and the many times she has offered people a shoulder to cry on.

I admire Nicole Thauvette tremendously and sincerely appreciate her friendship, so I have decided to celebrate her myself and award her the very first Lys de Salaberry—Suroît. Thank you, Nicole. She is such an inspiration.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I just have a little suggestion to keep the conversations outside. There are some great S.O. 31s, Statements by Members, going on today. I think everybody wants to get a good clip and make sure we hear everything that is going on. Let us keep those conversations outside.

*[Translation]***SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, April 4, I had the privilege of participating in a local fundraiser in support of Ukraine.

[English]

Thanks to Mayor Jim Watson and local elected officials, Councillors Matt Luloff, Laura Dudas and Catherine Kitts, for joining us. The community of Orléans was invited to visit the drive-thru set up at Soul Stone Restaurant to pick up delicious, traditional Ukrainian delicacies, perogies and borscht.

This amazing event was organized by the Knights of Columbus in partnership with Sam and Emily Hee, owners of Soul Stone Sushi Bar and Grill, who graciously provided their indoor space to the many volunteers to help set up the distribution of food.

I want to recognize John Sanko and his family for his effort and his leadership in making this such a great success. Orléans residents naturally responded to the call, as 609 dozen perogies were sold within two hours. With a fundraising goal of \$20,000 between this event and the GoFundMe page, today we have reached close to \$19,000.

[Translation]

All of the proceeds are going to the Red Cross Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Appeal.

[English]

Again, I thank Orléans for its generosity and support.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, I would remind members that S.O. 31s are actually 60 seconds long.

* * *

ROYAL MANITOBA WINTER FAIR

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past week, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair opened its doors to thousands of enthusiastic visitors after a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19.

Held annually in Brandon, the fair is one of western Canada's largest agricultural events and one of only two fairs in Canada to receive royal designation from Queen Elizabeth II. We could feel the energy in the Keystone Centre as visitors took in the world-class show jumping and heavy horse competitions. Show jumper Piet Van Genugten and his horse Haido performed impressively and won the Wawanesa Insurance Grand Prix as the finale to the week.

Livestock displays, live entertainers and hundreds of exhibits engaged folks of all ages and all walks of life. The hands-on agricultural education program and petting zoo put smiles on plenty of kids' faces. Thousands of people, myself included, were incredibly happy to get back to this time-honoured tradition in our community.

Statements by Members

Congratulations to Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba president Kathy Cleaver and her board on another great fair, and thanks to all the volunteers who invested their time in the fair's success.

* * *

DAVID KILGOUR

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday our friend, former MP and cabinet minister David Kilgour, died.

Everything in David's life was animated by his deep Christian faith. The anti-politician's politician, David ran for the Conservatives and won. He ran for the Liberals and won, and ultimately sat as an independent.

He had little or no time for the compromises of politics, or prime ministers or party leaders. If a government hung in the balance over Darfur, so what? If he was banned by the Government of China for advocating on behalf of the Falun Gong or the Uighurs, so what? David's passion was so strong and his advocacy so effective that it was ultimately taken up by many others.

While David could be described as a maverick with a cause, he also knew how to work a room. He put people together to move agendas, and David always had an agenda. David lived by Matthew 22: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind," and "love your neighbour as yourself."

David had a diverse set of neighbours, and he loved them all. I thank Laura for sharing him with us.

* * *

● (1410)

WINDSOR JOURNALISTS

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard it said that stories create communities. For decades, my community has been home to three of the best storytellers in Canada. They are journalists representing print, radio and television who have signed off on their last assignments.

Jim Crichton anchored *CTV News Windsor* for 21 years. Anne Jarvis was an award-winning reporter and columnist for the *Windsor Star* for 32 years, and Tony Doucette spent 38 years at CBC, including 16 years as the host of *Windsor Morning*. Together, they were the pen, the voice and the trusted source for tens of thousands who tuned in or turned the page to make sense of our world. Anne said it best:

This job was an adventure every day. I've covered prime ministers and premiers,...

But often, those who inspired me most were ordinary people who enriched the community in all kinds of ways.

I thank Anne, Jim and Tony for sharing their talents and enriching our community by helping us to tell our stories.

* * *

2020 SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an incident that sadly will live in infamy, and in the minds of the citizens of Portapique, Nova Scotia,

and indeed of all Canadians. I refer to the incidents of April 18 and 19, 2020. Over this less than 24-hour time span, 23 lives, including that of an unborn baby, were senselessly taken.

The families, community members and all of us continue to mourn. This unfathomable act of violence occurred in small-town Canada. All of us continue to question the whys and the hows of this mass tragedy. Our feelings continue to be raw. The questions continue to be great. The sorrow experienced continues to be, at times, overwhelming.

My comments today will not provide great relief to those who are suffering; however, they will know that their loved ones and their terrible grief have not gone unrecognized. They are remembered and shared by those of us in the House of Commons today and, as the anniversary of the tragedy looms ever closer, by all Canadians.

Let us forever remember those families and all of those affected in our thoughts and in our prayers.

* * *

EASTER

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Christians in Canada and around the world have been preparing through Lent for the joyous arrival of Easter: the feast of all feasts that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ in both our communities and our hearts. As engraved over the windows of the Peace Tower, here on Parliament Hill, "Where there is no vision, the people perish". That is from Proverbs 29:18.

This year, we enter Easter at a challenging time that calls for peace, healing and hope, as well as a worldwide vision that invites all of us, regardless of faith, to seek unity. Easter is a time of new beginnings when we are reminded of God's providence and unconditional love, for Jesus bore our sins on the cross and made intercession for our transgressions. As we let go and let God, this Holy Week we lift our eyes to the cross to receive the grace of amazement.

I wish everyone celebrating in Vaughan—Woodbridge and around the world a blessed Holy Week and a happy Easter. *Buona Pasqua a tutti.*

* * *

[Translation]

JEANICK FOURNIER

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a performance on the well-known show, *Canada's Got Talent*, two days ago that is worth mentioning here in the House.

Jeanick Fournier, from Chicoutimi, was the recipient of the famed golden buzzer for her outstanding performance of Céline Dion's *I Surrender*.

Jeanick's background is quite remarkable. She started singing in her church choir and now she is on the big stage. Her performance was impressive and very inspiring for all the young singers who saw it.

I had the chance to see her on the regional circuit, and here she is on the national stage. With her talent, she is on her way to international fame. Jeanick deserves every success. Her involvement in the community and her professional career make her an incredible asset to our region. She is, quite simply, impressive and inspiring.

Congratulations and good luck.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 12, thousands will visit the Ohel: the resting place of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, for the 120th anniversary of his birth.

The Rebbe's teaching has imparted to the Jewish people a sense of responsibility to God and to one another. He was a leader who exemplified true selflessness, and whose altruism grew in others exponentially and continues through the unparalleled success of the Chabad movement. He took a people decimated by the Holocaust and inspired them to believe in God's providence again.

This great modern Jewish sage was born in Ukraine, which is a country that today is an example of moral clarity and strength in the world. It is a country where Chabad's humanitarian effort is nothing short of heroic. The Rebbe would go on to engineer the global Jewish renaissance committed to caring for the spiritual needs of all Jews, wherever they could be found. He turned Judaism outward instead of inward.

Today, Jews and non-Jews around the world are influenced by the Rebbe through his thousands of emissaries, through his teachings and through his actions. It is not only the Rebbe's birthday, but it is a day of virtue for Chabad in our communities and for the entire Jewish people.

* * *

BORIS BROTT

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Boris Brott, an icon of Canadian culture, was killed by a hit-and-run driver on Tuesday.

Hamilton Spectator columnist Susan Clairmont wrote:

Among the steel mills and hardscrabble neighbourhoods, for richer and for poorer, from school halls to concert halls, the maestro believed our lunch-bucket town could love classical music.

He was right.

But even more, we loved Boris Brott.

Statements by Members

His accomplishments are legion; too many to mention. He was an Officer of the Order of Canada and a passionate conductor internationally renowned for making classical music relatable. He was the artistic director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra for more than 20 years. He performed at Carnegie Hall, Covent Garden and even a blast furnace at the Dofasco steel mill. In 1988, he launched the Brott Music Festival. It is Canada's largest orchestra festival, and brings classical music to the streets of Hamilton.

Our shocked city has been stunned silent. My deepest condolences to his wife Ardyth, his children and grandchildren.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, working families in my district of Edmonton Griesbach cannot afford to keep waiting to get the basic dental care and medicine they need. Working people who are struggling to get a roof over their heads cannot afford to keep waiting while house prices skyrocket and rents keep going up.

Métis, Inuit and first nations people across Turtle Island cannot afford to keep waiting for the federal government to finally honour its obligations. The planet cannot afford to wait for real climate action, and none of us can afford to keep waiting while billionaires and big corporations dodge their taxes and leave the rest of us footing the bill.

New Democrats are done waiting. We are done waiting for real action from the government. Now is the time for results. Make no mistake: New Democrats will get results. We will keep holding the government accountable, we will keep winning victories that make life more affordable and we will keep working for people across the country. Today's budget is a floor, not a ceiling.

Kinanaskomtinawaw.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is World Health Day and the theme this year is "Our planet, our health".

Since the environment is one of the primary determinants of health and, unfortunately, of disease, it is more important than ever to rethink the world and our society so our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to grow up in a healthy environment with the best possible living conditions. Talking will not get us there, only action will.

The government must decide, once and for all, to be consistent, take action, and assume its responsibilities by protecting the environment and funding health care.

Oral Questions

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those in the health sector who are doing all the heavy lifting and who can no longer wait for ongoing, significant and unconditional funding.

Health is a collective responsibility. We must decide to make it a priority.

* * *

● (1420)

[English]

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday was World Autism Awareness Day and 24 years since my son, Jaden, was diagnosed. Jaden would normally be in Ottawa with me, but last week, he tested positive for COVID. He has bounced back quickly, but sadly is not able to travel.

As the years go by, we learn more about autism and both the strengths and challenges that come with the label; still, so much remains unknown. Thankfully, more and more autistic Canadians are sharing their stories, and mysteries that we once only viewed as problems to be solved we are learning to embrace as diversity that enriches our entire human experience.

Some of my favourite moments are spent sitting beside Jaden and just being with him, looking into each other's eyes with smiles on both of our faces, content with the part of each other that remains unknown.

There is so much I do not know in those moments, but I am intensely aware that Jaden loves me. Through a connection I could never begin to explain, I know that he knows I love him. There is no knowledge more important to me than that.

* * *

RWANDAN GENOCIDE

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 28 years ago today, more than one million people died in the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, and to this the world said, “never again”. “Never again”, but yet again the world is dealing with the consequences of not seeing each other's humanity.

I want Rwandans watching this today from my riding of London West and across Canada to know that the world sees them and the world recognizes their resilience and willingness to rebuild and to walk the path of reconciliation no matter how hard it is and how hard it has been. They have chosen healing and rebuilding.

As I stand before the House today, 82 million people have been forcibly displaced across the world. The Ukrainian and Afghanistan crises alone have created respectively 6.3 million refugees. I want all of us to reflect on these numbers. It is our job as leaders to carry out the “never again” words in our actions to ensure that the next generation of Rwandans, of Tutsis across the world, do not have to face another moment to invoke these words.

On behalf of all Rwandans who are no longer with us today, on behalf of the children of families, including my own, who have been forever changed by what happened during the cold nights of April 1994, I say to them, “never again”.

I ask members of the House to stand with me in a moment of silence for the voices that will never speak again. Let us commit to never sit in silence and always use our voices and actions to fight against hatred and discrimination of all kinds.

Twibuke twiyubaka.

The Deputy Speaker: I know there is a request for another moment of silence, and maybe we will do them together. There has been a request for a moment of silence for the people lost in Portapique, and we just had a request for the people of Rwanda, so let us stand in a moment of silence for them.

[A moment of silence observed]

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know this NDP-Liberal government is not big on transparency. Recently Canada witnessed a kind of justice more closely associated with the Middle Ages. Nobody knows where or when this phantom trial took place. We also do not know the judge, the accused or the lawyers, and there is no transcription. RCMP investigators and federal prosecutors participated in this North Korea-style travesty of justice.

What role did the Liberal Minister of Justice play in this trial that violated every basic principle of our country's judicial system?

● (1425)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the open court principle is a fundamental principle in our justice system. I am very concerned about media reports on the judicial process in Quebec. I gather that the director of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada issued a press release. As we all know, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada is an independent arm's-length entity. Because of the court orders in this case, I cannot comment further.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is budget day. It is a parliamentary tradition for the details of the budget to be kept under wraps until it is read by the Minister of Finance in the House. It is even a legal obligation to prevent the disclosure of privileged information. This morning we learned that the member for Burnaby South and unofficial deputy prime minister of the NDP-Liberal government received a briefing on the content of the budget.

When did this briefing take place? Who was there? Did the members of the NDP branch of the government swear an oath of confidentiality on the secret information they received?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget will be presented very soon and all the details will be available. Certainly, everyone had access to the same details. We did not share information. That is not true at all.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did not get a secret briefing. We now know that the NDP members received information on the budget. The Canadian Press reported this morning that the health critic said after receiving a briefing that he was optimistic the government would keep its commitments on dental care and pharmacare in the budget. That is highly confidential information and may influence the stock market value of many companies working in that field.

What exactly do the NDP member and his leader know?

Did they swear an oath before receiving that information, yes or no?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there was no secret discussion. No information was shared. That is absolutely not the case. A very important budget for our country will be presented in a few moments. The member will have to wait for the budget. All the details will be there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I am already hearing some things over there I am not quite liking, so can we just keep the comments down? I do not mind a little bit of back-and-forth, but I heard a couple of words from back there that I do not like.

The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon has the floor.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Prime Minister to acknowledge the economic pain that Canadians are suffering. Rather than answering, he chose insults.

Let us try again. Former Liberal MP Dan McTeague said food prices are going to go up 30% to 35% as a result of increases in diesel prices. Gas and diesel are up, food prices are up and Canadians are scrambling to make ends meet. All the while, greenhouse gases go up as well.

Will the Prime Minister just admit, as confession is good for the soul, that his environmental and economic policies are a failure and apologize to Canadians?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the conversation yesterday was about our investments working, so maybe I can quote some investments that have been made in his province of Ontario: \$6 billion with GM in Oshawa for an electric vehicle plant and \$5 billion between LG and Stellantis in Windsor to make the

transition to electric vehicles. These are only some of the investments we have made. In fact, our emissions are going down by 30 million tonnes already, and that is just the beginning.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, let us talk about investments. We have all heard of the Midas touch. It turns things to gold. We have the Liberal touch, and it is not gold.

Liberals have invested billions of dollars to increase housing affordability. What has happened? Housing prices have doubled. They spent \$60 billion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and emissions went up. Helping the middle class? Sixty per cent of Canadians are having trouble making ends meet.

How is it when the Liberal government spends money, Canadians just end up further behind?

• (1430)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are showing once again that their main role in this chamber is to delay important legislation and distract from important issues.

They obstructed getting COVID supports to Canadians and Canadian businesses and they obstructed legislation to get us to climate goals. Now they are delaying and trying to gut Bill C-8, a bill that would help farmers and teachers and Canadians and people to access rapid tests. When will they bring Bill C-8 to a vote, support Canadians and focus on affordability?

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at 3:20 p.m. yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that he had been asked by the UN to promote sustainable development around the world.

Barely an hour and a half later, our champion of the environment approved Bay du Nord, a one-billion-barrel oil project that will pollute for 30 years.

It took him an hour and a half to make a mockery of his mandate and show the entire world that not only is Canada an oil state, but also a rogue state. The Prime Minister is literally redefining the art of talking out of both sides of his mouth.

Does he have any credibility left today when it comes to the environment?

Oral Questions

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for La Prairie. I find it quite ironic that the Bloc Québécois is asking to cancel projects supported by the provinces, when its position is always to tell the federal government to mind its own business. In this particular case, the provincial sovereignty issue is on a bit of a sliding scale.

I would answer my colleague's question with another question. Would the Bloc Québécois be in favour of the federal government conducting an independent assessment of the third link in Quebec City?

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the worst part is that, as recently as Monday, the UN warned that no new oil and gas development should be approved if we want to have any chance of curbing climate change.

That did not stop the government, just yesterday, from approving Bay du Nord, which will pump out up to 100,000 barrels of oil a day. Drill, baby, drill.

This government took the report released by climate experts from around the world and threw it in the garbage. Not even the recycling, the garbage.

How can it still claim its decisions are based on science?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that the Bay du Nord project underwent a four-year, independent environmental assessment, not to mention consultations with scientists, experts and 42 indigenous communities.

I would also like to remind him that his leader allowed drilling on Anticosti Island without any environmental assessment whatsoever.

We, on our side, have been assessing this project for four years, and I have received a green light from the federal environmental assessment agency.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago, the IPCC released an alarming report.

This is an emergency. The future of our children and grandchildren is at risk. We must take bold action.

The Minister of Environment took action: He approved a new fossil fuel project. He will continue to hand out billions of dollars to oil and gas companies. He could have said no to this project, but he said yes to more oil and more emissions.

Does the minister understand that an additional billion barrels of oil is not a green project?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie that the IPCC stated that to limit global warming to 1.5°C, countries must reduce their emissions by 43% by 2030. Canada's objective is to reduce emissions by 40% to 45%.

The IPCC said that all sectors must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The plan we introduced in the House last week clearly shows how all sectors in Canada are in the process of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions.

The IPCC also noted that, despite everything we are going to do, we will continue to consume oil, with 35 million barrels in 2050. That oil must emit as few emissions as possible and they must be sequestered.

● (1435)

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just days ago, the IPCC released a scathing report saying the planet is burning. The Minister of Environment called it “sobering”. If we have any chance of beating the climate crisis, we need to urgently transition away from fossil fuels, invest in green energy and support workers, yet he just approved Bay du Nord, a massive fossil fuel project that will add the equivalent of seven million cars to the road.

Why is the minister ignoring the science and putting Canadians at risk?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the IPCC said in its report this week is that in order to prevent global temperatures from rising beyond 1.5°C, countries have to reduce, between now and 2030, their greenhouse gas emissions by 43%. We are on track to reducing them by 40% to 45%. The IPCC said that every sector of our economy needs to be reducing its emissions.

I tabled last week in the House a report that shows how exactly we are going to do that between now and 2030. The IPCC also recognized that we will still be using fossil fuels even in 2050, and we need to make sure that these are as low-emitting as possible and we need to capture all of the emissions.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the world agrees that carbon capture storage is key to decarbonizing our fossil fuels, which the world will need for decades. Enhanced oil recovery produces low-carbon oil and is better for the environment. The Minister of Natural Resources claimed on the international stage that Canada will introduce a tax credit like the American 45Q. Guess what. The 45Q includes enhanced oil recovery but, when in Canada, he says that EOR will not be included.

Can the minister tell Canadians today what his actual position is on carbon capture?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly, carbon capture and sequestration is one tool in a broad tool box associated with reducing emissions across the economy, starting with putting a price on pollution and working through regulatory mechanisms and investment mechanisms, as well as tax measures.

We have been clear that there will be a tax credit associated with the implementation of carbon capture and sequestration technologies. That will be something that the hon. member will hear about a little bit later from my colleague, the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was once the world leader in carbon capture technology. We lost our position to the United States because the investments went where it made economic sense. Technology will always follow the opportunities. A carbon capture tax credit without EOR is simply words on paper, which will not produce what the world is demanding, lower-carbon Canadian resources.

Will the minister live up to his international commitment and advance carbon capture EOR, or will he just sit back and let the Americans continue to eat our lunch?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I were the hon. member, I would not be so dismissive of Canadian technology. Two of the top 100 clean-tech companies in the world this year were Canadian carbon capture and sequestration technologies.

I would ask the hon. member perhaps to spend some time with clean tech in Canada. Canada is a leader in carbon capture. We are a leader in clean tech around the world.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their support, both before and after I brought attention to the uncertainty facing the Bay du Nord project in the House on February 14.

Yesterday was a great day for energy workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada and the world with the approval of this project, but the Minister of Natural Resources has delayed the next round of exploration licences by 90 days. This year's seismic program has been defunded by the provincial government.

Can the NDP-Liberal minister tell us if these decisions were backroom deals that were made in order to secure approval for Bay du Nord?

• (1440)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly, as the hon. member would expect, ministers of the Crown work with their provincial counterparts across a range of issues all the time.

I was very pleased to work with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to launch changes this week on the offshore energy boards to include renewable energies, offshore wind and hydrogen, and certainly to focus on the transition that will be happening with respect to energy down the road. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has been a great partner in that regard.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is disgusting that Newfoundland and Labrador has to come to Ottawa, cap in hand, and beg to get our natural resources developed. One stakeholder told me that delays in Bay du Nord have investors rating their projects at a 50% higher risk of never being developed on our offshore.

Oral Questions

Will the NDP-Liberal minister commit to maximizing the number of energy jobs in Bay du Nord by exempting it from the federal carbon tax?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly as everybody in the House should appreciate, we will be going through an energy transition over time. The Bay du Nord project is one of the lowest emission-intensity projects in the world. It is something that will fit within our cap. It will be net zero by 2050.

It is an important step forward, but so is actually making steps towards a transition to renewable energies and hydrogen, something I was very pleased to work on with my counterpart in Newfoundland and to announce this week.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the NDP-Liberal government is presenting its inflationary budget that in no way responds to Canadians' economic realities. Every time this government intervenes in Canadians' lives, they wind up poorer.

Will the NDP-Liberal government have the courage to take meaningful action to combat inflation?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will find out what is in the budget in less than two hours.

I would, however, like to talk about Bill C-8, which is being studied by the House. This bill would allocate \$1.7 billion for rapid COVID-19 tests and \$100 million to improve ventilation in our schools, and it would also provide tax breaks for businesses and for teachers.

Why are the Conservatives playing politics instead of helping Canadians? What do they have against teachers? What do they have against small businesses?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response from the NDP-Liberal government is not reassuring anyone. Food prices are up, clothing prices are up, transportation prices are up, housing prices are up and the price of recreational activities is up.

The NDP-Liberal government has not thought this through, so taxes are up and the carbon tax is up. When will the Prime Minister finally take his hands out of Canadians' pockets?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives often bring up the very important issue of affordability.

Let us talk about the Conservatives' voting record. We proposed the Canada child benefit and the Conservatives voted against it. We proposed a plan to help seniors and the Conservatives voted against it. We put money in teachers' pockets and the Conservatives voted against the measure.

We care about affordability on this side of the House. Who knows what they care about on the other side?

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I kind of feel like I am at a hockey game. Let us quieten down a little.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change's decision to approve the Bay du Nord project is bad news for the planet.

The IPCC made it very clear that we need to curtail oil production. Canada, meanwhile, is going into expansion mode. The goal is more production, more drilling and more oil.

In the fight against climate change, we have a choice: We can be part of the problem or part of the solution. We either pollute more or we change our habits.

I would never have thought that this Minister of the Environment would one day be applauded by the Conservatives. Why has the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change thrown in the towel?

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

I have never owned a car, and probably never will. However, the train I take to Ottawa, the airplanes many of us use, run and will run for a long time on oil—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1445)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would like to hear the minister. The hon. minister.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: These vehicles and many others we need will continue to use oil. That is why we chose a project for the planet that emits 10 times less greenhouse gas emissions than the oil sands and five times less than the average project.

This project will have to achieve net-zero emissions. This is the first time in Canadian history that we have imposed such a condition on an oil development project. We will continue to work to fight climate change.

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is one person here who approved one billion barrels, and he is on the other side of the House.

Reducing emissions by 43% by 2030 means we all need to roll up our sleeves: governments, businesses and citizens. The minister's approval of Bay du Nord sends a very bad message, that it is no big deal. Talk about wishful thinking. The IPCC was clear. We must reduce our oil production and consumption now.

By approving it, does he realize that he is contributing to climate warming here and abroad for years and years to come?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the plan we tabled in the House last week was based on several sources of information, including information from the Canada Energy Regulator showing that oil production is projected to increase. Despite this, the plan we tabled does a very good job of demonstrating how we will meet our 2030 targets in all sectors. This plan has been praised by all stakeholders across the country.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a week after presenting his plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Minister of the Environment approved the folly that is the Bay du Nord project, which will emit a staggering 430 megatonnes. In the category “say one thing and do the opposite”, this is tough to beat.

This brings us to what UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday about efforts to fight climate change: “Some governments...are saying one thing, but doing another. They are lying.”

Was he talking about Canada?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assure my colleague that he was not talking about Canada.

We have a price on pollution that is among the most ambitious in the world. We have regulations on methane emissions, and we will cut those emissions almost in half by 2025 and by 75% by 2030. That is one of the most ambitious targets on the planet. We are investing in electrification and public transit, to decarbonize the aluminum sector in Lac-Saint-Jean and the steel and auto sector in Ontario and other parts of Canada.

Our plan is working. Emissions are already starting to go down and we will keep working at it.

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to failed Liberal policies like the carbon tax and trucking mandates, Canadian farmers are facing skyrocketing input costs on fuel, feed and fertilizer. The Liberals could offer relief. Instead, they are making it worse. The NDP-Liberal carbon tax coalition increased the tax on April 1 and still refuses to clarify its position on a 35% tariff on Russian fertilizer. Canadian farmers are being asked to feed the world as a result of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, but to do that they need clarity and they need certainty.

Once again, will the Liberals exempt the 35% tariff on fertilizer purchased from Russia before March 2?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that our government is ensuring that farmers in Canada are getting the support they need.

We are well aware that at this time, springtime, they need inputs and fertilizer. That is why we are doing everything we can to ensure that fertilizer arrives in Canada and gets to our farmers.

Last week, we announced the emissions reduction plan, which included \$1 billion to support our farmers.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we learned this week that the federal budget will likely provide \$2 billion to accelerate the production of certain minerals needed for electric vehicles.

Canada is not targeting phosphate, even though we can potentially mine it. Tesla has chosen to use a lithium iron phosphate battery. Phosphate must be part of the strategy. That is one of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Will phosphate be part of the strategy and will it be entitled to its share of the pie?

● (1450)

[English]

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly Canada is moving forward with the development of a critical minerals strategy. As the hon. member knows, we released a list of critical minerals some time ago. I think we will see, as the hon. member indicated, that we intend to re-source the critical minerals strategy. It is a critical element of driving the economy going forward, all the way from extraction to processing to battery production and electrical vehicle production. It is certainly part of the growth agenda for this government.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers feed Canadians and the world, but in Lakeland three straight years of ag disasters have hurt crops and forced farmers to sell livestock

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early. It is not over yet and the damage will happen for years. The NDP-Liberal plan to cut fertilizer use will slash yields even more. It risks Canada's food supply and security. Farmers pay a quarter of their bills in carbon tax. Fertilizer and fuel costs have doubled. Liberal inflation makes everything more expensive.

Why are the NDP-Liberals making it so that farmers cannot feed their fellow Canadians or their cattle?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell members that our government is there to support farmers. We have been there working collaboratively with my colleagues, the provincial ministers in the Prairies, to make sure that ranchers are able to get feed for their cattle. We have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars through the AgriRecovery programs. We have supported CFA through the Hay West program. We are there with support.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister confirms he used modelling from the Canada Energy Regulator to develop his climate plan, but the modelling shows that the per-barrel output in 2050 will be the same as it is today. So much for saving the planet. Meanwhile, he has signed on to a massive oil expansion and is going to give billions to carbon capture schemes.

We have a narrow window to develop a clean energy economy, so enough with the “drill, baby, drill” stuff. When is the minister going to stop dancing to the tune of big oil?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we reformed environmental impact assessments under Bill C-69, we made a commitment that we were going to depoliticize the process of environmental projects in Canada. Our government has accepted the environmental impact assessment done by the agency, which conducted a rigorous, robust and transparent process that lasted almost four years. This project will include requirements for net-zero emissions by 2050 and 137 other environmental protection measures. The project aligns with the government's ambitious emissions reduction plan and will need to fit under the emission cap for the oil and gas sector.

Oral Questions

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Alberta families want to do their part to help Canada meet its emissions targets, and they deserve good-paying jobs in the new economy, yet the government continues to abandon them. Instead of diversifying our economy, the government gave billions of dollars to big oil companies on vague promises to reduce emissions. Guess what? Those billions resulted in almost no reductions.

In today's budget, will the government finally invest in Alberta workers and families?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly, economic diversification of all economies to ensure that we are on a growth trajectory as we move toward a lower-carbon future is very important. I will tell members that Canada is extremely well situated to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise. In Alberta, those opportunities certainly involve carbon capture and sequestration, hydrogen, biofuels, critical minerals and a range of other things. We are working with the Government of Alberta, and we will be launching a process over the coming months to work toward economic diversification not just in Alberta, but in every province and territory in this country.

* * *

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, making post-secondary education more accessible is critical for improving the quality of life for all Canadians, including in the north and Arctic. That is why our government has invested over \$47 million toward the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning and a new science building at Yukon University, and toward transforming Aurora College into a polytechnic university. One of my priorities is to ensure northerners and indigenous peoples have greater access to post-secondary education in the north.

Can the Minister of Northern Affairs provide an update on how our government is working to close existing gaps?

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Yukon for his commitment to improving educational outcomes and for joining me last week when we accepted the much-anticipated final report from the task force on northern post-secondary education. I thank all members of the task force for their hard work and their commitment to education. Their comprehensive calls to action provide a road map for all orders of government, indigenous partners and institutions to improve education in the north and the Arctic. I look forward to working with partners to move their recommendations forward.

* * *

• (1455)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Russia is committing war crimes. Reports from Bucha of civilians shot with hands tied behind their backs and of others dumped in makeshift pits have shocked the world. In response, allies have expelled some 400 Russian diplomats, and President Ze-

lenskyy has pleaded with the Prime Minister for Harpoon systems so that Ukraine can defend itself in the future against these types of massacres.

Why has the government not expelled Russian diplomats? Why has it not provided the Harpoon systems? Why is Canada offside with some of its closest allies?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we are leaving no stone unturned in our aid to Ukraine. I have announced six tranches of military aid, totalling over \$110 million. That aid has included hand grenades, rocket launchers, ammunition, sniper rifles, Carl Gustaf weapon systems and fragmentation vests, among other things. We will continue to explore every opportunity to deliver aid to Ukraine.

I spoke with my counterpart, Minister Reznikov, this morning for the second time this week to ensure that we are collaborating with our allies and with Ukraine to deliver as much aid as possible as soon as possible.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are reports that some 300 civilian men were massacred last week in Mali by Malian and Russian forces. Only a few short years ago, for a brief moment in time, the government sent hundreds of Canadian troops to Mali and over a hundred million dollars in aid, and then it lost interest.

Does the government have any plans to stop future atrocities in Mali seeing that it was once the government's foreign policy priority?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is extremely concerned about human rights atrocities taking place in Mali. That is why we have been meeting with our like-minded allies about this issue from day one. That is why we have raised concerns about Wagner mercenaries, who are probably working with the understanding of Russia. That is why we will continue to stand with the people of Mali as we make sure that Mali is not isolated further in the world.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the most recent G7 meeting, the Prime Minister and the Liberal government committed to eradicating forced labour from international supply chains. However, the Liberals still entered into a \$222-million contract with Supermax, which has been linked to egregious acts of forced labour, and they signed a \$250-million contract with Sinopharm, a communist state-owned company controlled by Beijing that is committing gross human rights violations against Uighurs, Tibetans and Falun Gong practitioners.

How can the Prime Minister justify these contracts, which are directly funding gross human rights violators?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to ensuring the highest ethical standards for government procurement and preventing human rights abuses, including forced labour in our supply chains.

With respect to Supermax, following allegations of forced labour from the supplier, we terminated all contracts with the supplier. In fact, as soon as we heard these allegations, we stopped shipments from entering Canada.

We are going to continue to monitor our supply chains closely and continue to work to ensure we are following the rigorous standards that Canadians expect.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the government has been way behind on supply chain slavery and has done nothing effective. We need to see a new framework very soon.

When it comes to international human rights, holding perpetrators of sexual exploitation and violence accountable should be central to a feminist foreign policy, but allegations of exploitation and violence at the World Health Organization in Congo and also at UNRWA remain unaddressed.

When will the Minister of International Development take action to ensure that employees of Canadian-funded international organizations are held accountable and face consequences for sexual violence?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at my first meeting with the head of the WHO, we raised these concerns and they assured me that they are working on this. In fact, anytime I speak with any head of a UN organization, the one thing we focus on is making sure that all humanitarian aid focuses on the protection of all human rights.

Oral Questions

• (1500)

[Translation]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Bloc Québécois presented a motion stating that excluding some candidates from holding university research chairs was not the right way to foster inclusion and diversity in our institutions. The motion was rejected.

In principle, this decision is debatable. However, by imposing the same quota for university research chairs in Quebec as in other parts of Canada, the government is completely ignoring the regional realities of Quebec and of its university network. Could we at least agree that a French-language university in Rimouski does not have the same diverse candidate pool as a university in Toronto?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been firm in its support for all scientists and researchers. Over the past seven years, we have helped rebuild Canada's world-class science and research sector.

We will continue to support our robust science and research ecosystem, which reflects Canada's strengths and advances Canadian interests, because we know that it is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is one thing for the government to oppose any proposal from the Bloc Québécois and to accuse us of bad intentions, but can it keep ignoring the fact that many members, including some Liberals, have said they are not comfortable with using exclusion as a way to be more inclusive?

That is exactly what the member for Louis-Hébert did yesterday when he called for changes to the federal rules on research chairs to prevent these kinds of situations. Will the government at least listen to reason from its own member?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I proudly stand behind our government's record on supporting science and research from coast to coast.

Our government has made science a priority after years of neglect. Not only is science back, but the scientific community now better reflects the Canada of today.

Institutions are taking measures to integrate diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices. We will always support Canadian scientists and researchers.

*Oral Questions**[English]***FINANCE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget is about to be tabled and holds market information that will impact the portfolios of average Canadians. That is why it is released after the markets close. However, the NDP leader revealed at a press conference this week that he was given an advance screening, and he shared this information with other members of the NDP elite. This could be considered important intel for insider trading.

Did the finance minister inform NDP members privy to the budget of their responsibilities to the Ethics Commissioner, or did she give them time to adjust their stock portfolios first?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister will be sharing the budget with Canadians in just a couple of hours, and I can assure all members of the House that all budget secrecy and all respect for this chamber was respected in the course of budget 2022.

This is an opportunity for me to share the exact economic fundamentals with which we head into this budget: 3.4 million jobs recovered, 6.7% GDP growth and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. The economy is growing. Canadians love it, even if the Conservatives do not.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the NDP leader and members of the NDP elite were given insight into the upcoming budget. Meanwhile—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get through the question.

The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek may start again.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the NDP leader and members of the NDP elite were given insight into the upcoming budget. Meanwhile, this information was not even provided to Liberal members of Parliament.

Did the Minister of Finance provide the debt management plan of the Government of Canada or fiscal tables during her budget briefing with the NDP?

• (1505)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. members of the House that no such information was shared.

Let me share this. Canada's AAA credit rating is intact. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We have the second-fastest growing economy in the world. Next year, we are on track to being the fastest-growing economy in the world. The economy grows, the Conservatives grow, and guess what? Canadians love it.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sharing market-moving information could be illegal. When I look from the NDP to the Liberals and the Liberals to the NDP, it is al-

ready impossible to tell the difference. Maybe that is why the NDP leader got a budget update yesterday.

One of the most important parts of the budget is the projected revenues, so to the finance minister, did the leader of the NDP get an update on the projected revenues for the next six years?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget will be presented in the House of Commons today at 4:10 by the Deputy Prime Minister, at which time the House will understand exactly what is in budget 2022.

The economic fundamentals are sound. In 2021, we had the largest trading surplus since 2008. We will have the fastest growing economy in the G7 next year, and the second-fastest this year. It is such good news for Canadians. I do not know why the Conservatives do not want to share it.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORT

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, the Minister of Sport announced the appointment of Canada's first sport integrity commissioner. The goal is to eliminate the abusive, inappropriate and unacceptable conduct that is too often part of Canadian sport.

Abuse has a significant negative impact on our athletes' development, and the appointment of a person of integrity like former athlete Sarah-Ève Pelletier will go a long way toward improving the situation. Can the minister explain how this new position will have a positive impact on young Canadian athletes?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her excellent work in the riding of Saint-Laurent.

It is vital that we protect our athletes, and that is what the new sport integrity commissioner will do. The appointment of Sarah-Ève Pelletier is a critical step in moving toward a sport system free of harassment, abuse, discrimination and maltreatment.

We will make this independent mechanism mandatory for all federally funded national sports organizations. These abuses must and will stop.

[English]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has an intellectual property problem. Yearly, Canada produces \$39 billion in intellectual property, the currency of innovation, while the U.S.A., in comparison, produces \$6.6 trillion, or 169 times what Canada produces. What is worse, we are giving our IP away. This year the former Google chairman thanked Canada for IP that Canada had developed and which was commercialized in the U.S.

Will Canada, in this budget, have an intelligent budget to ensure Canada produces its own intellectual property, or are we going to continue to let the U.S.A. eat our IP for lunch?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we introduced Canada's first ever intellectual property strategy in 2018 with investments of over \$85 million, and we have built on those investments. Budget 2021 proposed to invest \$90 million to create ElevateIP, a program to help accelerators and incubators provide start-ups with access to intellectual property expertise. Moreover, budget 2021 also proposed \$75 million for the National Research Council's industrial research assistance program to provide high-growth client firms with access to expert intellectual property services.

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day the Liberal government says, "We have got Canadians' backs". Do they realize how insulting this sounds to people who are suffering? Work happy while people suffer—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It works both ways folks.

The hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha can start again.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Speaker, every day the Liberal government tells us how much money the Liberals have spent to help people. Do they know how insulting this sounds to people who are suffering, such as the 12,000 independent travel advisers, all women, who have been left out of financial supports? How does that sound to Diane, a senior who cannot afford her \$430 propane bill? How does it sound to 30-year-old Chelsea, who will never afford a home? What about Brian, who cannot afford to run his farm?

Will the government actually have Canadians' backs in today's budget, or will it just be more debt and "Justinflation"?

● (1510)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the fall, we have invested over \$12 billion in tourism, the hardest-hit sector, so that every single tourism operator in this country can have a chance to get back on their feet. We have reduced the border restrictions. Tourism is now on the rise.

If the opposition, which is opportunistic and obstructionist, wants to help Canadians and focus on affordability, they can do the right

Oral Questions

thing, bring Bill C-8 to a vote, get us past 40 hours of debate and actually get affordability back on the table for Canadians.

JUSTICE

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine being a victim of Canada's worst ever mass shooting where 23 lives were senselessly taken, including that of a baby. The federal government has promised an advocate. For seven months the position of the federal ombudsman for the victims of crime remains unfilled. It has not been filled in due time as promised by the Minister of Justice. Despite the efforts of the Mass Casualty Commission, affected families have nowhere to turn because of this unfilled vacancy.

When will the minister do right by the families, all Nova Scotians and many others affected, and appoint a victims advocate?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I extend my support and condolences to all of those families affected. I can assure the hon. member, this House and all Canadians that the filling of that position is moving in due course according to the rules of fair hiring we have put in place, and I would expect that announcement will be made very soon.

We have invested in victims across Canada in a variety of programs. We will continue to do that. Victims remain at the centre of what we do—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: As a Nova Scotian, I want to hear the answer to this one.

If the hon. minister wants to take another 10 seconds, he can finish his comment.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I was concluding by saying that we support victims. They are at the centre of all the reform we are doing, and we will make that announcement very soon.

*Business of the House***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know this government is committed to ensuring Canada's economic recovery continues at warp speed. In fact, the government has had such success that some sectors are facing labour shortages. One of the best ways to manage this is to welcome temporary foreign workers into Canada.

This week, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion announced a series of significant enhancements that will make the TFW program more flexible for employers while adding protections for employees. Could the minister share with us some of the changes outlined in the announcement?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Surrey Centre for his hard work on this file.

The TFW workforce solutions road map aims to improve the program for employers while strengthening worker protection without compromising Canadians' jobs. Canada has a low unemployment rate and an unmet demand in many sectors.

Stakeholders across the country have rallied in support of these measures. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce said the measures will fill job vacancies across our economy and support our postpandemic recovery and economic growth. We agree.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost a year since Greyhound ended its bus service in Canada. Last May, the minister told us that he would provide "safe, reliable and affordable transportation across the country." One year later, rural communities are still waiting to hear the plan. Without reliable buses, people cannot get to work or access services, and here in northwest British Columbia on the Highway of Tears, it is particularly concerning for indigenous women and girls.

Will the minister tell us when rural communities will have bus service they can rely on?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share my hon. colleague's concern about several communities in rural parts of our country that have been lacking access to intercity bus service. Our government is very much concerned with this reality. As I shared with my colleague, the issue is a provincial responsibility. We continue to work with our provincial partners to identify ideas of how we can move forward. I met with several bus operators. We are looking for ways to support them, ensuring that residents in rural areas have access to affordable, reliable and safe intercity bus service.

* * *

● (1515)

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, enough of the political games. The Minister of Environment and

Climate Change today is responding to questions from the Bloc and the NDP citing his approval of Bay du Nord, when he knows he is setting a net-zero condition that will not be worth the paper it is printed on if we emit up to 100 coal-fired power plants in the year before we even get to that point.

He cites the IPCC when he knows full well it has said that investing in projects like this is a moral and economic madness. Production would not even start until 2028. When will the government realize that being a climate leader means investing in a just transition for workers and not in caving to the oil and gas lobby?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IPCC did not say what he just said. The secretary general of the United Nations said that. There is a big difference.

The IPCC said every country needs to reduce its emissions by 43% by 2030. That is exactly what we are doing. The IPCC said any fossil fuel that we will still be using needs to be abated. That is exactly what we are doing by putting in place mandatory measures for net zero by 2050. We will continue to do that.

* * *

VICTIMS OF TRAGIC EVENT IN NOVA SCOTIA

The Deputy Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand there is agreement to observe a moment of silence. I now invite the House to rise and observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the tragic event that happened two years ago in Nova Scotia.

[A moment of silence observed]

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a tradition in the House to have the Thursday question done by the House leader, so in his stead, I will do so. There is a two-week break coming up for Easter. It is also the month of Ramadan and it is also Passover.

Upon our return, I am wondering if the government House leader could inform the House how he plans to budget the time of the House of Commons.

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say to my colleague opposite that I hope he and his family are able to enjoy this time and enjoy Easter. I know we will be celebrating. I will say *Ramadan Mubarak* to those who are recognizing Ramadan and wish everybody a joyous Passover.

This afternoon, we are going to be continuing with the second reading of Bill C-14, the Quebec electoral representation bill. As members know, at 4 p.m. the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be presenting the budget.

When we return after the constituency weeks, we will continue debating the budget for a number of days, which will be Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Then after that, it will be the budget implementation act.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PRESERVING PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (electoral representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak about Bill C-14, the preserving provincial representation in the House of Commons act.

The seat allocation and electoral boundaries readjustment process is an important part of our democracy. Its purpose is to ensure that the House of Commons reflects the changing nature of Canada's demographic profile and that all Canadian voices are heard.

I will admit that this bill is a small change. It is a small compromise to an elaborate electoral formula that has a long history of compromise, competing regional interests and vigorous political debate.

We can debate about tinkering with the formula to appease political interests, but at the end of the day, most members of the House would likely agree that baked into the redistribution is systemic unfairness. This exists because the redistribution formulas were created for a country that no longer exists. The current formula was made for a country that did not see people living in the west at the numbers they do today.

At Canada's founding, the fathers of Confederation had a vision for Canada, how it would be a place for freedom-seeking people around the world and how it would be a place of economic development and prosperity, but I do not think the fathers of Confederation could have foreseen the tremendous growth and prosperity of western Canada. As a British Columbian, I am proud of the contributions my province and the people I represent have made to our country.

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While Canada has changed and grown, we continue to be bound by rules for electoral redistribution that are and always will be systematically unfair for Canadians living in certain regions of the country, namely Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

Let me share an example to highlight this, but first, to preface this, it is important to note that, in 1991, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that representation by population is fundamental to electoral redistribution. My riding of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon currently has 101,216 people. The average riding size of the four ridings—

An hon. member: I am having trouble hearing him.

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, it is just a little loud in here.

• (1520)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Can we take the conversations outside, please?

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, the average riding size of the four ridings in Prince Edward Island is 38,582. Some basic math here shows that, on average, a vote in Prince Edward Island is worth 2.62 times more than a vote in my riding. How is this fair? How is this democratic? How does this live up to the principles upheld in our courts in 1991? Are the concerns of someone from Charlottetown worth 2.62 times more than someone from my riding? Should they be allowed to have 2.62 times the amount of say in the House of Commons?

My riding is significantly smaller than the ridings of my colleagues from Edmonton—Wetaskiwin and Calgary Shepard. The comparison to these ridings is even more extreme. Obviously, I am not naive to the constitutional rules and implications that make this possible, but what I am trying to illustrate here is that there are significant flaws in the way seats are redistributed in Canada. Fundamentally, I believe that one vote in British Columbia should be equal to one vote in Prince Edward Island, to one vote in Quebec and to one vote in Ontario. This is democratic. This is what we should be trying to achieve in Canada, but this is not the case and it should be fixed.

In 1915, the first change was made to the original representation formula by the adoption of the senatorial clause, which is 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. It had the immediate effect of guaranteeing four seats for the province of Prince Edward Island instead of the three it would otherwise have had. It still has four seats today.

Every 10 years when the topic of redistribution comes up, we apply duct-tape fixes to a spillway-gate problem. We are elected to the House to be leaders, to have a vision for our country that extends beyond the next time Canadians go to the polls. The actions we take and do not take have a lasting impact on the future of our democratic system. This is the mantle of a member of Parliament, for all of us collectively, and it is the mantle that should weigh heavily on the minds of every single member in the House.

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In 2011, the Harper government provided a lump-sum improvement to the under-representation problem by providing 27 seats to British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta respectively. This was a partial fix to our problem, but it still disadvantages those three provinces.

On March 2, I voted against the Bloc Québécois motion that would solidify Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons by redrawing the federal electoral map. My reasoning had nothing to do with Quebec. It had to do with the lack of equal representation in my province of British Columbia.

In retrospect, Quebec is the closest to fair representation that we have in Canada. However, giving Quebec one more seat under the bill so that it would not lose any proportionality in Parliament is a poor solution to an existing problem. The bill would make the under-representation problem marginally worse than it was going to be anyway. Once again, British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario representation pay the price.

The reason the bill is before us today is solely in response to the Bloc Québécois motion. As an MP from the west, this drives me and, frankly, makes me a little upset. I predict that we will be here in another 10 years tinkering with this formula again, trying to compromise and appease the greatest amount of political interest. Alternatively, we could use the next 10 years to come up with a permanent solution that can preserve our democracy and last the test of time.

Again, the Supreme Court, in 1991, upheld that representation by population matters. When Confederation took place, nobody ever imagined that British Columbia especially would be as powerful both economically and demographically as it is today.

My argument here today is that our Parliament needs to reflect the reality of the changing demographic nature of Canada. Our Parliament needs to take into account where people are living and working. Our Parliament needs to take into account that all of our systems in our democracy uphold the rights of individuals to have an equal say in the House of Commons.

• (1525)

What we are doing here today is a band-aid solution to a larger problem that we, collectively, have to address.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member who just spoke seems to have a differing opinion from the official Conservative caucus position on this. I do not know if he was just expressing his personal position and he will be voting against the legislation, but my understanding was that the official opposition recognizes the true value of the legislation and is going to be voting in favour of it. I would like to assure the member that it was not the Bloc that influenced the government to bring forward the legislation. The Liberal caucus, as a whole, recognizes the true value of ensuring that we give that base floor, something which does not necessarily make the government unique. Even Conservative governments in the past have done the same thing.

I would like him to provide his thoughts regarding how he will be voting on the legislation.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, Conservatives moved a unanimous consent motion around the same time as the Bloc Québécois motion essentially asking for this. In my remarks, I pointed out problems that both the previous Conservative governments and previous Liberal governments have had regarding this issue. In fact, this is an issue that extends beyond political parties. It is about fair representation for all Canadians.

British Columbia is systemically under-represented in the House. Imagine today if Quebec had three seats taken away from it and Quebec was 1% under-represented like British Columbia is today. Every Quebec MP, irrespective of party, would be up in arms. I am doing my duty as a British Columbian to make sure that taxpayers in my province have an equal say.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I too want to reassure my colleague.

Bill C-14 was not introduced by the Bloc. That is not what we were asking for. We were asking to maintain Quebec's political weight. It is not about the number of seats, but a proportion of the total number of seats.

He will be pleased to hear that I agree with him on several points. The Constitution is outdated. The Senate is outdated. I have a solution for that: Quebec independence. Unfortunately, that will not happen here.

My colleague raised some very good points, particularly regarding the proportionality of votes, which is important, but has he forgotten the notion of nationhood?

Is he telling me that the country we are talking about is not that of Quebecers? If so, the concept of a founding nation would no longer be taken into account.

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I could not hear most of the question, so I will just say this: The first political experience I had in my life was in 1993 when the previous Reform Party talked about the west wanting in. Some of those structural grievances that led to that populous movement relate to what we are discussing here today, which is that British Columbia—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, if I understood correctly, the member had no interpretation while I was speaking. I think it is important that he understand the question.

Could we have consent for me to start over?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member was not using his earpiece. The Chair is not to blame. We should not take time away from other questions.

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I did hear one point from the member opposite about the proportionality that Quebec wanted to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have another point of order.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I ask you this question with all humility.

If the member did not hear the question, what is the point of him answering a question he did not hear?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It was not a problem with interpretation. If the member did not use the appropriate tool to hear the question, the House will get the answer he gives.

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I heard the word “proportion” and that the Bloc Québécois put forward that motion because it wanted to maintain the proportionality of the Quebec members of Parliament in the House. I stand here today as a member of Parliament for British Columbia and my objective is that the proportionality of my province is one day reflected in our chamber. British Columbians only have six Senate seats. British Columbians do not have a guaranteed seat on the Supreme Court. British Columbians pay equalization to other provinces. British Columbians just want an equal say in how our democracy is run.

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

This legislation not only protects the number of seats in Quebec but in all provinces and territories. The NDP will continue to ensure Quebec remains fairly represented here at the House of Commons.

My question to the member is this: Should the 1991 Supreme Court case that he just cited also be used to increase indigenous representation?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I think the key thing that needs to be upheld in this chamber is representation by population.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with my colleague, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

I come from a province that for years was under-represented in this House when its population was taken into account. For years, Albertans felt there was an injustice in the way seats were apportioned in the House of Commons, until more seats were finally added in 2011 to allow fair representation for my home province.

Canada has always been a place of competing interests, of give-and-take between provinces and regions. As a nation we have always tried to strike a balance, knowing that compromise is necessary but not always acceptable to everyone.

In theory, we agree with the principle that each member of Parliament should represent a riding with a similar number of electors.

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It may not be a perfect system, but it allows constituencies to be more or less equal in population size and makes it possible for a member of Parliament to serve his or her constituents without being overwhelmed by the numbers.

Of course, we do make allowances for history. No province can have fewer MPs than it does senators, and we have agreed that no province should have fewer MPs than it did in 1985. That explains why Prince Edward Island has four ridings with a population size of about 35,000 people each, while ridings in Nova Scotia are double that population. In Quebec, most of the ridings have more than 100,000 people, as do all the ridings in Alberta, except for one.

We have accepted this disparity in the name of national unity. The system has worked well on the whole, and, as I mentioned, the number of MPs was expanded in 2011 to allow for more representation in this House, especially for Alberta and Quebec. I have to wonder, therefore, why the government desires to change the rules once more.

As population shifts, so do riding boundaries and representation in this House. That is something we all understand and accept, or maybe not all of us. Looking at the bill, I wonder what sort of precedent it sets and what sort of message it sends about democracy in Canada. How do those who are already feeling jaded about the state of our political system feel about the rules apparently once more not being applied fairly?

In any sports contest, the rules are agreed upon before the game starts. Both teams take to the field knowing what they must do in order to win. They do not pause midway to suggest rule changes because they have decided that the rules they started with were not good enough. I know that may be an imperfect analogy, but I am sure this proposal to redistribute seats and change the 1985 benchmark looks that way to many Canadians. Someone does not like the rules of the game, so they want to change them.

The population of Canada is constantly shifting. Our cities are growing bigger. Some regions are attracting more immigrants than others. The reasons for demographic change are many, varied and complex. In this House we are tasked with finding a balance between competing needs or, more accurately, competing wants. The latest census data, as examined by Elections Canada, would see the addition of four more seats to this House to take into account the increase in our nation's population. Given the increasing workload of members of Parliament, I doubt there is any member of this House who would disagree with the conclusion that more seats will enable MPs to better serve constituents.

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● (1535)

The problem is that under this impartial formula, Quebec would lose a seat in the House of Commons. Those from that province are understandably concerned that their influence will be lessened, though there would still be more MPs from Quebec than from the three prairie provinces combined and Quebec would still have more MPs than it did 20 years ago.

What are we to do here? We could guarantee that Quebec would always have the same number of seats it does now, which is the intent of this bill. There are those who believe it important to recognize the historical importance of Canada's only francophone province. Would that be enough? What if the population of Quebec continues to shrink? This bill would amend the Constitution Act, 1867 to provide that when the number of seats in the House of Commons is redistributed after each decennial census, no province would have fewer seats than it had in the 43rd Parliament. At some future time, will we want to guarantee an even more uneven distribution of seats as a tribute to what once was? What will the 50th Parliament wish to address, or does our living democracy mean that this House will only tackle this question in the future?

After all, the House of Commons is the people's chamber and should be representative of the population across the country. Conservatives respect the fundamental constitutional principle of representation by population that was affirmed by the Supreme Court in 1991. However, we acknowledge that sometimes, as is proposed by this bill, there are other considerations, and deciding which considerations are more important is a difficult task.

This bill reflects a motion that this House considered last month, which stated:

That the House oppose any federal electoral redistribution scenario that would cause Quebec or any other province or territory to lose one or more electoral districts in the future, and that the House call on the government to act accordingly.

Coming from a province that will receive three more seats in the next redistribution and received additional seats from the last one, I understand the desire of members from an area of the country not blessed with Alberta's growth to preserve what they have. The question we must ask and hopefully answer is this: Is this the wisest course to take? This Liberal bill preserves the redistribution formula created by the previous Conservative government's 2011 Fair Representation Act, which added 30 new seats in the House of Commons. That was a huge jump in representation, much larger than the one about to be implemented, and perhaps set the stage for where we find ourselves today. Instead of giving a larger workload to members of Parliament and adding the resources necessary to do the extra work, this House chose to increase its size. How long can we continue to expand in this way?

The Liberal government has made many promises on electoral reform but has failed to even start an honest discussion on what this House should look like a decade or a century from now. We should be having a longer and deeper discussion on how we want to govern ourselves. Until we do, we will be passing this same act, with slight amendments, every decade or so. Is that the way we want to run a country?

● (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the single largest increases in the number of members of the House of Commons was under Stephen Harper. It went from 308 to 338. If we follow the logic of what the member is saying, we would think that it was the previous administration that deferred the decision on something that the member is being somewhat critical of us for not debating today.

Does the member feel this might be a type of ongoing discussion, possibly in the format of an opposition day, in which we could continue to have this debate? I realize there is a need to ultimately see this bill pass so that the Quebec commission is able to continue to do its fine work.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, this bill definitely carries on the legacy that started in 2011 under Prime Minister Harper, and that is what we see going through this bill.

I do not know what the member interpreted from my speech. I tried to outline the historical background of what happened and why we are at this stage. Asking for perfection or for better is something that everybody aims for. That is what I was trying to do here in the speech that I delivered today.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his speech, my colleague noted that Mr. Harper's government recognized Quebec as a nation. Since then, however, there has been no concrete action.

The bill maintains Quebec's number of seats at 78, but Quebec loses relative weight because increasing the number of MPs in Canada reduces Quebec's weight from 23% to 22.51%.

It is all well and good to maintain the number of seats in Quebec, but if the number of seats elsewhere in Canada is increased, Quebec loses out in the end. What does my colleague think?

● (1545)

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, Quebec was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the law that was passed under the Harper government in 2011.

The hon. member was asking about the fluctuation of the numbers here and there. I think the speech made it very clear how this happened and what the formula should look like. The bill that is presented here is also very clear. We will wait and see what happens with the vote in a few hours.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate that for us in the NDP it is critical that Quebec in particular maintains its position in Parliament. I would ask my colleague to share his views once more on the importance of Quebec's role in Parliament and the importance of preserving that role.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, the motion that was passed with regard to maintaining the number of seats that the province has right now actually came from our side, from our deputy leader.

It is clear in my speech. I am not sure if the hon. member heard the whole speech, but what I was trying to say today was very clear in the speech.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is an interesting piece of legislation. I wonder if the member could speak more on the importance of the principle of representation by population, the principle that every Canadian should have a reasonable expectation that their vote counts for the same thing and that if they move to a different part of the country, their voice does not suddenly become more valuable or less valuable. That is just a common-sense proposition of fairness.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, we can never ask for too much justice. This is about justice, about representation, about having equal opportunity for MPs to represent their different areas, and about having equal opportunities for constituents to be fairly represented by MPs and through proper budgets.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Edmonton Manning for sharing his time with me, and I also want to say hi to him from Yosef, who just cut my hair. I know they are good buddies, and I think they sing together, or something like that, so I just want to say hi to him from Yosef.

I will say off the top that I will be voting in favour of Bill C-14. I want to make that clear to the member for Winnipeg North, so that he does not have to stand and ask me that question. This particular bill would clarify that we would be, from now on, using the current number of seats in every province as the floor for this country going forward. That said, I would like to talk a bit about representation, and particularly regional representation. These are issues that have motivated my interest in politics, and they motivate a great many Albertans' interest in politics, and none more so than a fellow from my riding named Edward Goodlife.

I always wish I had Edward Goodlife's last name. I think he has lived a good life. He is a good friend of mine. He moved to Canada from England. He chose Canada. He moved to a little place called Granum, Alberta, and started a nail factory there. He was driving across western Canada through the Prairies and he noticed that all the houses in our part of the country were built out of wood. He said to himself, "All these houses need nails to put them together," so he decided to start a nail factory in Granum, Alberta.

One of the reasons we know each other is through politics. His motivation for getting involved in politics was a whole litany of issues he had when getting his nail factory started and profitable in Canada, such as issues of regulation and taxation and issues of regional disparity. The story he told me was that it would cost him

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something like \$23 to ship a pallet of nails on the railway to Ontario, yet his competitors in Ontario could ship that same container of nails to Alberta for \$8. This is something that I think is called a mill rate on the railway, and I am not 100% sure of all the details of how that worked, but one of the things that really grated against him was the fact that the system seemed to be set up against him.

In order for him to compete with folks who were manufacturing nails in Ontario, he had to pay three times more in shipping costs than people in Ontario shipping their goods in this direction, particularly nails. He could compete with them here, but he had to work fairly hard. When he tried to break into new markets, particularly in eastern Canada, he was up against that.

It is these kinds of stories and sentiments that bring the frustration we have whenever we get talking about representation in this country. The Bloc members have brought into this debate, and I am not sure where they got it, the idea of proportionality and that somehow Quebec should own 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. I am happy to see that the government did not put into this legislation the maintenance of one particular seat. I am supportive of that, but this idea of proportionality is very interesting and comes up very often in my conversations around northern Alberta.

This idea of proportionality comes up often, and people show me graphics all the time. I see them on Facebook and places like that. People have made graphics showing the proportion of the seats based on regions of the country, and they come to my office and are very upset about this. I will say to them that there is nothing in our system that says anything about proportionality of seats.

• (1550)

Our system is based on having the House of Commons and the Senate. The House of Commons is based on the number of electors, and the Senate is supposed to be a representation of the landowners, provincial interests or those kinds of things. We could perhaps say that, in the case of the Senate, there should be some redistribution of the Senate seats or an addition of new Senate seats so that provincial representation was perhaps weighted equally or on percentage of land mass, percentage of taxation income, resource revenue or something. We can have that discussion, but that is not what this bill is about. Those are some of the things that come up often. Proportionality is not something that comes into the seating in the House of Commons.

The other thing that is fascinating, and that many Canadians, particularly from either Quebec or Ontario, do not think about, is how close they live to Parliament and Ottawa. I have the privilege of touring school groups through the House of Commons. They come up from southern Ontario to have a tour of the House of Commons, and I am happy to oblige by doing that. I note and tell them all the time that they are fortunate that they live a four- or five-hour drive from Ottawa. Growing up and in my high school years, in grade three and grade six we went to the legislature buildings in Edmonton, but I never had the opportunity to do a field trip to Ottawa with my class. That is something that, being from Alberta, we just did not have the opportunity to do.

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We see that borne out in lobbying efforts and the way that these systems are set up. Ottawa is a distant place for Albertans. Ottawa is not something that we think about. It is not in our lives every day, and because it is far away we do not necessarily have access to that place as somebody who lives a lot closer has. Sometimes we, who are from northern Alberta, realize that the decisions made in Ottawa are often influenced by the people who live near to it. That makes sense because they are closer. They have access. They can drive there in an afternoon and make their case, whereas people in northern Alberta do not. It is a 3,600-kilometre tour from my house to Ottawa. It takes three and a half days to drive there, and it is an expensive endeavour.

All of these things lead to the sense of a lack of representation in Ottawa. It is not even necessarily that we have more people voting for fewer people, which is the case, but also the distance of it. That is just a reality. Other than perhaps moving the Parliament buildings to Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver or Peace River, that is going to be the reality.

The member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon was making some great points around this as well, and the fact that the representation in our part of the country feels quite a bit different than it does for people who live close to Ottawa. We want to make sure that representation happens. Having a hard and fast rule on representation by population is just a matter of fact, in the same way that Quebec and Ontario being close to Ottawa is a matter of fact. I am happy to support this particular bill, but I would just point out that there are other things that are matters of fact that we cannot change and that we should not necessarily worry about. The same thing goes for representation by population. That is the way the system is set up, and we should work hard to maintain that principle here in this place.

With that, I am looking forward to the budget this afternoon and to having Alberta's interests represented, in particular northern Alberta's. One of the major reasons that I got involved in politics was to represent Alberta in Ottawa, and I am pleased to do so today here in this Parliament.

• (1555)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a fundamental flaw in terms of what the member is talking about.

It is a whole lot easier to get from Edmonton or Calgary, let us say, to Ottawa than it is from many Ontario communities. In fact, one might have to take a long drive to an airport to take another airplane to come to Ottawa: Canada's capital.

My concern is that, number one, the member should not try to give the impression that one has to live close to Ottawa to have influence. I like to consider that I carry some influence, as the member no doubt carries influence, and I am from Winnipeg.

One does not have to be from Ottawa in order to have influence. That is my suggestion to the member. Second, with respect to the bill itself, would the member not recognize that the simplicity of the bill is to ensure that we recognize that no province should have a reduction in the number of seats based on the last federal elec-

tion? Would he not agree, simply put, that this is a good thing and something worth voting for?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I did note, right off the top of my speech, that I was supporting this bill. I even noted that I was doing that for the benefit of the member for Winnipeg North, so I am pleased that he listened to my speech.

The other point I would make is that my point all around distances to Ottawa was not so much that we can change that but that this is a matter of fact. We cannot change the fact that Ontario is closer to Ottawa than Alberta is. We should just respect these things that are a matter of fact and respect the idea that representation by population is a matter of fact.

• (1600)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought the member really nailed it, especially with his description of the challenges of the factory owner at the beginning. This country has a unique history: some provinces in the east came together to create the country, but western Canada was always viewed as kind of a colonial possession. It has been a long struggle to work toward some degree of recognition of provincial equality.

Would the member want to comment on some of the legacy of that history, in terms of Senate representation and other things? These really come from the fact that it was originally central and eastern Canada that formed the country, but they viewed the west very much as a kind of colonial appendage instead of as an equal partner.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question. That is indeed the case. I would just recognize that P.E.I., for example, negotiated its way into Confederation, as did B.C. That is not as much the case for Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, which were more creations of the federal government—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Photos in the chamber are not allowed, and a minister of the Crown should know that.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, my colleague from Peace River—Westlock asked a key question, namely, why Quebec should have a special privilege, the “nation clause”, recognizing that this founding nation, which is francophone, unique, and has its own culture, deserves a certain political weight in the House of Commons. For me, this is fundamental.

Would my colleague be willing to take a step to ensure that the Quebec nation is heard in the House and that it has 25% of the seats? If not, we will leave.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the proportion was never part of the discussion. I do not ever remember hearing anything about the proportion. The other thing I would just note for the member is that northern Alberta has one of the largest French-speaking diasporas. It has been there since before Quebec was even founded.

Since the 1700s, we have had Quebec communities in northern Alberta. These communities are thriving. These are born French-speaking people, and places like Falher, Guy, Marie-Reine and St. Isidore have all been amazing French communities that are thriving. We see people emigrate from around the world to northern Alberta.

The French population of Alberta is actually growing, not necessarily in proportion to the rest of the province, but it is a growing population. I would hope that Quebec would see growth in its population and then it could maintain its seats as well.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some of the things that Parliament can do to augment the representation and balance are things such as more money for rural and larger geographic areas or larger populations. Most recently, the government has limited MPs and their offices to five immigration enquiries, which actually makes it disproportionate. I would like the member's thoughts on the other things we could do to make things more balanced for representing Canadians, even though we might have disproportionate populations.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, once again the member has highlighted one of the things that are a matter of fact. The number of immigration queries that we have has no bearing on where we come from in the country. I would say that the government has totally mishandled the immigration file in this country, leading to the fact that my office has to deal with an inundation of immigration cases as likely the member's does as well. Limiting that to five cases per office seems ridiculous because there is not necessarily any correlation between one member's office having more or less just based on where they are in the country.

The Deputy Speaker: That will finish our discussion of Bill C-14. We will come back when we have the opportunity. We will take a few moments for the minister to arrive in the chamber.

• (1605)

[Translation]

It being 4:06 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 3, concerning the budget presentation.

* * *

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved:

That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Budget

She said: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I would like to table, in both official languages, the budget documents for 2022, including notices of ways and means motions.

[Translation]

The details of the measures are contained in these documents.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I am requesting that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions.

[English]

We all remember that Thursday in March just over two years ago when our travel plans were hastily cancelled, when our children came home from school, when we all rushed to the grocery stores to buy toilet paper and hand sanitizer. We realized then that this virus would disrupt our lives, but few of us imagined quite how much or for quite how long, yet here we are. We bent but we did not break. Canadians have done everything that was asked of them and more, so to all of them, to all of us, I want to start by saying, "Thank you."

[Translation]

I now have the honour of tabling my second federal budget. I tabled my first in April 2021. In the year preceding it, the Canadian economy had teetered on the brink. Our economy contracted by 17%—the deepest recession since the 1930s. Three million Canadians lost their jobs. It was a shattering blow.

The Great Depression scarred this country for a generation or more. It was entirely reasonable to fear that the COVID-19 recession would likewise hamstring us for years; that millions of Canadians would still today be without jobs; and that the task of rebuilding our country would be the work of decades.

We knew we could not let that happen, and so we provided unprecedented emergency support to Canadian families and Canadian businesses. Our relentless focus was on jobs—on keeping Canadians employed, and on keeping their employers afloat. It was an audacious plan, and it worked.

• (1610)

[English]

Our economy has now recovered 112% of the jobs that were lost during those awful first months, compared to just 90% in the United States. Our employment rate is down to just 5.5%, close to the 5.4% low in 2019 that was Canada's best in five decades. Our real GDP is more than a full percentage point above where it was before the pandemic. Let us think about that. After a devastating recession, after wave after wave and lockdown after lockdown, our economy has not just recovered; it is booming.

The Budget

Today Canada has come roaring back, but Canadians know that fighting COVID and the COVID recession came at a high price. Inflation, a global phenomenon, is making things more expensive in Canada too. Snarled supply chains have driven prices higher at the checkout counter, buying a house is out of reach for far too many Canadians and now Putin's barbaric war is making food and gas even more expensive. The money that rescued Canadians and the Canadian economy, eight dollars out of every \$10 invested, was deployed chiefly and rightly by the federal government, but our ability to spend is not infinite. The time for extraordinary COVID support is over, and we will review and reduce government spending because that is the responsible thing to do.

On this point, let me be very clear. We are absolutely determined that our debt-to-GDP ratio must continue to decline and our deficits must continue to be reduced. The pandemic debt we incurred to keep Canadians safe and solvent must be paid down, and it is being paid down. This is our fiscal anchor. This is a line we will not cross. It will ensure that our finances remain sustainable.

Canada has a proud tradition of fiscal responsibility. It is my duty to maintain it and I will, so now is the time for us to focus with smart investments and a clarity of purpose on growing our economy and on making life more affordable for Canadians. That is what our government proposes to do, and here is how we propose to do it.

Pillar one of our plan is investing in the backbone of a strong and growing country: our people.

[Translation]

Let me start with housing. Housing is a basic human need but it is also an economic imperative. Our economy is built by people, and people need homes in which to live. Our problem is simply this: Canada does not have enough homes. We need more of them, fast.

This budget represents the most ambitious plan that Canada has ever had to solve that fundamental challenge. Over the next 10 years, we will double the number of new homes we build. This must become a great national effort, and it will demand a new spirit of collaboration—provinces and territories; cities and towns; the private sector and non-profits all working together with us to build the homes that Canadians need.

• (1615)

[English]

Over the next 10 years, we will double the number of new homes we will build. This must become a great national effort, and it will demand a new spirit of collaboration with provinces and territories, cities and towns, and the private sector and non-profits all working together with us to build the homes Canadians need. We will invest in building more homes and in bringing down the barriers that keep them from being built. We will invest in the rental housing that so many count on. We will make it easier for young people to get those first keys of their own.

We will make the market fairer for Canadians. We will prevent foreign investors from parking their money in Canada by buying up

homes. We will make sure that houses are being used as homes for Canadian families rather than as a speculative financial asset class.

On housing, I would like to offer one caution. There is no one silver bullet that will immediately, once and forever, make every Canadian a homeowner in the neighbourhood where they want to live. As Canada grows and as a growing Canada becomes more and more prosperous, we will need to continue to invest year after year after year in building more homes for a growing country.

[Translation]

A growing country and a growing economy also demand a growing workforce. A lack of workers—and of workers with the right skills—is constraining the industrialized economies around the world.

However, there is good news. In 2020, Canada had the fastest growing population in the G7. At a time when the world is starved for workers and talent, our country's unique enthusiasm for welcoming new Canadians is a powerful—and particularly Canadian—driver of economic prosperity.

This budget will make it easier for the skilled immigrants that our economy needs to make Canada their home, and to do the jobs they are trained for.

[English]

We will also invest in the determined and talented workers who are already here. We will make it more affordable for people working in the skilled trades to travel to where the jobs are. Programs like the enhanced Canada workers benefit will make it more worthwhile for people to work and will make life more affordable for our lowest-paid and very often most essential workers. We will invest in the skills that Canadian workers need to fill the good-paying jobs of today and tomorrow. We will break down barriers and ensure that everyone is able to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

One of those barriers is affordable child care. When we promised less than a year ago to make high-quality affordable child care a reality for all Canadians, our plan was certainly welcomed, but the cheers were muted by justifiable skepticism. After all, similar promises had been made and broken for decades, five decades in fact. That is why, as I stand here today, I am so glad to say we have delivered. We have now signed agreements on early learning and child care with every single province and territory in our great country.

The Budget

This is women's liberation. It will mean more women no longer need to choose between motherhood and a career. This is feminist economic policy in action, and it will make life more affordable for middle-class Canadian families. Fees are already being slashed across the country. By the end of this year, they will be reduced by an average of 50%, and in three years, child care will cost an average of just \$10 a day from coast to coast to coast.

• (1620)

Housing, immigration, skills and child care are social policies to be sure, but just as importantly, they are economic policies as well. Our strategy is what Janet Yellen, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, recently dubbed “modern supply-side economics”. Modern supply-side economics borrows the supply side's key insight that increasing supply is fundamental to growth, but takes a progressive people-centred approach. At a time when our chief economic problem is that there is too much demand chasing too little supply, this set of people-centred policies provides exactly what Canada needs right now. This pillar will create supply-led growth that satisfies the demand today that is driving inflation. It will help our economy grow sustainably and will make all of our lives more affordable.

[Translation]

Our second pillar for growth is the green transition. In Canada—and around the world—climate action is no longer a matter of political debate or personal conviction. It is an existential challenge. That means it is also an economic necessity. This is the most profound economic transition since the Industrial Revolution. The world economy is going green. Canada can be in the vanguard, or we can be left behind.

That is, of course, no choice at all—which is why our government is investing urgently in this shift. Our plan is driven by our national price on pollution—the smartest, most effective incentive for climate action. This budget launches a new Canada growth fund that will help crowd in billions of dollars in private capital we need to transform our economy at speed and at scale.

We will invest in Canada's remarkable abundance of critical minerals and metals. These are essential to the green transition, and the world's democracies must be able to produce them for ourselves and each other.

As automakers urgently retool their assembly lines to build zero-emission vehicles, we will make it more affordable for Canadians to buy them. We will build the batteries that power zero-emission cars and trucks, and we will invest in building charging stations from coast to coast to coast.

For our children, the green transition will mean cleaner air and cleaner water tomorrow. It will also mean good jobs for Canadians today.

• (1625)

[English]

Our third pillar for growth is a plan to tackle the Achilles heel of the Canadian economy: productivity and innovation. Canadians are the best-educated people in the OECD. Our scientists win the Nobel Prize and our cities are outshining Silicon Valley in creating high-paying technology jobs.

[Translation]

However, we are falling behind when it comes to economic productivity. Productivity matters because it is what guarantees the dream of every parent—that our children will be more prosperous than we are. This is a well-known Canadian problem and an insidious one. It is time for Canada to tackle it.

We propose to do so, in part, with a new innovation and investment agency—drawing on international best practices from around the world—that will give companies all over the country and across our economy the tools and incentives they need to create and invent, and to take risks and to grow.

We will encourage small Canadian companies to get bigger. We will help Canadians and Canadian companies to develop new IP—and to turn these new ideas into new businesses and new jobs.

These three pillars—investing in people, investing in the green transition, and investing in innovation and productivity—will create jobs and prosperity today, and build a stronger economic future for our children. They will make life more affordable, and they will ensure Canada continues to be the best place in the world to live, work, and raise a family.

[English]

From the first day we started working on this budget, this growth agenda was always going to be our focus. Then Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine. On that dark morning of February 24, a day of infamy, we woke up to a world utterly transformed. When Putin opened fire on the people of Ukraine, he also turned his guns on the unprecedented era of prosperity that the world's democracies had worked so diligently to build over more than 76 years. Our rules-based international order, built from the ashes of the Second World War, today confronts the greatest threat since its inception, so our response has been swift and strong. Canada and our allies have imposed the toughest sanctions ever inflicted on a major economy. Russia has become an economic pariah.

However, the mutilated people of Bucha, shot with their hands tied behind their backs, have shown us that this is not enough. Putin and his henchmen are war criminals. The world's democracies, including our own, can be safe only once the Russian tyrant and his armies are entirely vanquished. That is what we are counting on the brave people of Ukraine to do, because they are fighting our fight, a fight for democracy. It is in our own urgent national interest to ensure that they have the missiles and money they need to win. That is what this budget helps to provide.

The Budget

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also reminded us that our own peaceful democracy, like all democracies of the world, depends ultimately on the defence of hard power. The world's dictators should never mistake our civility for passivism. We know that freedom does not come for free and that peace is guaranteed only by our readiness to fight for it. That is why we are making an immediate additional investment in our Armed Forces and propose a swift defence policy review to equip Canada for a world that has become more dangerous. This budget will help provide the fiscal and physical firepower we need to meet any threat that may confront us.

We understand that security includes energy security, which Canada must work to ensure for ourselves and our democratic partners.

• (1630)

[Translation]

That is why we are making an immediate, additional investment in our armed forces, and propose a swift defence policy review to equip Canada for a world that has become more dangerous.

This budget will help provide the fiscal and the physical firepower we need to meet any threat that may rise to confront us.

[English]

The convoys of Russian tanks rolling across Ukraine did not change the fundamental goal of this budget, but Putin's attack on Ukraine and that country's remarkable and valiant resistance has reinforced our government's deepest conviction, a line that runs through this budget and each of the budgets that have preceded it: that the strength of a country does not come solely from the vastness of the reserves of its central bank or from the size of the force in its garrisons. Those do matter, to be sure, but they matter less than democracy itself. They can be defeated, and they are being defeated, by a people who are united and free, because it is the people who are every country's real source of strength. That is true in Ukraine and it is true in Canada.

Let me explain what we need if we are to build a strong country here at home.

We need housing that is affordable for everyone and investments that ensure an entire generation is not priced out of owning a home. We need to fight climate change so that we can leave our children with a livable planet. We need to face up to the sins of our past and ensure that indigenous peoples in this country are able to live dignified and prosperous lives. We need a health care system that allows people to see a doctor or a dentist and to get mental health care too.

We need a society that is truly equal for everyone, because the colour of someone's skin or who they love or where they were born should not dictate whether they get to share in the opportunities that Canada provides. We need a robust tax system that ensures everyone pays their fair share and we need an economy that allows businesses to grow and create good middle-class jobs so that everyone can earn a decent living for an honest day's work.

• (1635)

[Translation]

The brave people of Ukraine have shaken the world's older democracies out of our 21st-century malaise. They have reminded us that the strength of a country comes from the strength of its people. And they have reminded us that there should be no greater priority for everyone in this House than to build a country that we would all be willing to fight for.

That is what we have worked to do these last seven years. And that is what we will continue to do today.

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I notice the minister is wearing Conservative blue today, but that does not in any way transform her budget from being the first left-leaning NDP-Liberal budget.

The most pressing issue facing Canadians today is the cost of living, especially the housing affordability crisis. Millions of Canadians have seen their dream of home ownership slip through their fingers, and uncontrolled spending from the NDP-Liberal government has had a lot to do with that.

The minister's budget includes \$10 billion for housing and homelessness, including \$4 billion for a housing accelerator that will actually go to municipalities and not to those who wish to purchase homes but cannot afford to do so right now. In her speech, the minister made the following promise: "Over the next 10 years, we will double the number of new homes we build."

This is a serious question. Can the minister tell us exactly how many homes she and her government have actually built over the past, say, seven years? I would like just the number, please. I know she has to have the number because she made the claim. Again, how many homes has her government built over the last seven years?

• (1640)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite, first of all, for pointing to the colour of my suit today. I chose it intentionally, and I chose the colour of this button. I thought it was important to show my solidarity, and I think the solidarity of everyone in this House. I am glad to see the member opposite wearing a blue and yellow tie. I have recently learned in fact that his roots, like my own family's, are in Ukraine.

I am glad the member opposite spoke about housing. Maybe that is something else we can all agree on. Housing is the most pressing economic and social issue in Canada today. That is why it is the centrepiece of this budget, just as early learning and child care was the centrepiece of last year's budget.

The Budget

What is new and important about this budget, which again the member opposite has helpfully pointed out, is a focus on supply. What is new is an understanding that what we need to do as a country is find ways to tear down the barriers to building more homes. The member correctly points out that many of those barriers are at the municipal level. There are a lot of former city councillors and mayors in this House. They all understand very well that what we need to do is find ways to work together with municipalities, provinces and territories to build more of the homes Canadians need.

We will do it. We got early learning and child care done. We are committed, over the next 10 years, to doubling the new housing starts in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec, the provinces and Quebec's health sector are calling for an increase to the Canada health transfer to cover 35% of system costs. Not only is there no health transfer increase this year, next year, the year after or the years after that, but the government goes so far as to write that if the provinces call Ottawa, they will be advised about how to better manage their health care systems and make them more effective.

Can the minister tell me why she thinks that a government that has never managed a hospital in its life can manage health care systems better than the provinces?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, we fully understand that the provinces and territories are responsible for the Canadian health care system, which is excellent. We also understand that the federal government must help fund the health care system.

That is why, and it is written in the budget, we have “only” provided \$2 billion to the provinces and territories to help them with the problems the COVID-19 crisis has created in the health care system.

I would like to add that in this budget we are proposing a massive investment of \$45.2 billion through the Canada health transfer to support provinces and territories. That is a 4.8% increase over the baseline.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has heard from hundreds of experts who have told her that carbon capture, utilization and storage is “neither economically sound nor proven at scale, with a terrible track record and limited potential to deliver significant, cost-effective emissions reductions”, yet despite the IPCC just releasing another damning report about the state of the climate crisis, carbon capture and storage is the cornerstone of the climate efforts in the budget.

Does the minister recognize that the over two and a half billion dollars they have allocated for carbon capture and storage is a missed opportunity to build national renewable energy projects, like a western power grid that could put people to work and actually help us create new renewable sources of energy in Canada? This is something we absolutely have to do if we are going to electrify our economy and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1645)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians at home listening to the proceedings of the House will be a bit confused by what they are hearing, because they have heard a lot about collaboration between progressive parties, yet on this issue, I must differ from my hon. colleague. I absolutely believe in, and our budget is very clear on, the value of CCUS when it comes to a realistic, achievable and attainable emissions reduction plan.

The oil and gas sector is part of the Canadian economy and needs to be part of our emissions reduction effort. The CCUS plan, which we have worked on collaboratively with our environmental partners and oil and gas partners, is a very important part of that plan. It will help Canada reduce its emissions, and that is something that I think all of us agree is essential.

The member has spoken about the need to invest in renewable energy. We agree. That is why this budget includes considerable investments in the green transition, building on the vast investments in the green transition that our government has hitherto made, including the Canada growth fund, which will crowd in private capital for this essential economic transformation.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this appears, like all the other budgets so far from the government, to be one with lots of spending and good intentions but no results. The Parliamentary Budget Officer states that there are as many Canadians living in vulnerable homes now as there were when the government started, despite billions spent. Despite billions spent, the Library of Parliament says GHG emissions are going up every year. The Library of Parliament also says the government has had the 29th worst performance on debt-to-GDP ratio. Furthermore, the report “The Long Road” says Canada, for the next 30 years, will have the worst economic growth in the OECD.

If non-stop spending and crippling debt have not worked so far, what has changed that is going to work now?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, I am really sorry to say that the member opposite is simply inaccurately citing statistics. The reality is that Canada's economic growth today is among the strongest in the world. Our GDP grew more than 6% in the fourth quarter and is on track to grow 4% in the first quarter.

Canada's economic recovery is robust, and it is remarkable, particularly when it comes to jobs. In terms of debt to GDP and deficits, Canada is in the strongest fiscal position of any G7 country.

The Budget

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” That is a proverb one of my Liberal colleagues used earlier today, but it was in a different context. It was used in the context of Easter. However, the context in which I am going to use it is the budget, which is absolutely bereft of any vision.

The budget is bereft of any vision to meaningfully address what currently matters most to Canadians, which is the skyrocketing cost of living and the housing affordability crisis. There is no real plan to fight the inflation that has exacerbated this government's tax-and-spend profligacy. There is no overarching investment into economic growth, and no growth plan to improve our productivity and our ability to compete in the global marketplace. There is no grand plan to restore Canada's tarnished reputation as a good place to invest. Right now, we are dead last among the OECD countries when it comes to investment. Nor is there a grand vision to manage the massive debt load that my children and grandchildren will be left to repay, with interest, of course.

Like last year's budget, this one fails to put forward a credible fiscal anchor that outlines a clear pathway and a firm target to return to balance. There is no grand vision for restoring Canada's rep-

utation as a trusted middle power among the world's nations, neither is there a serious plan to harness the power and potential of our sustainably produced natural resources to address the environmental challenges facing our world. In short, this budget fails to deliver the visionary leadership that these times call for. Instead, this budget is emblematic of an unserious Prime Minister, an unserious Minister of Finance and unserious government.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” That is from the Proverbs of Solomon, who is considered to be one of the wisest men ever to walk the earth. We need a vision, and I will have more to say in the days ahead.

Until then and until tomorrow, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 4:52 p.m.)

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