



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

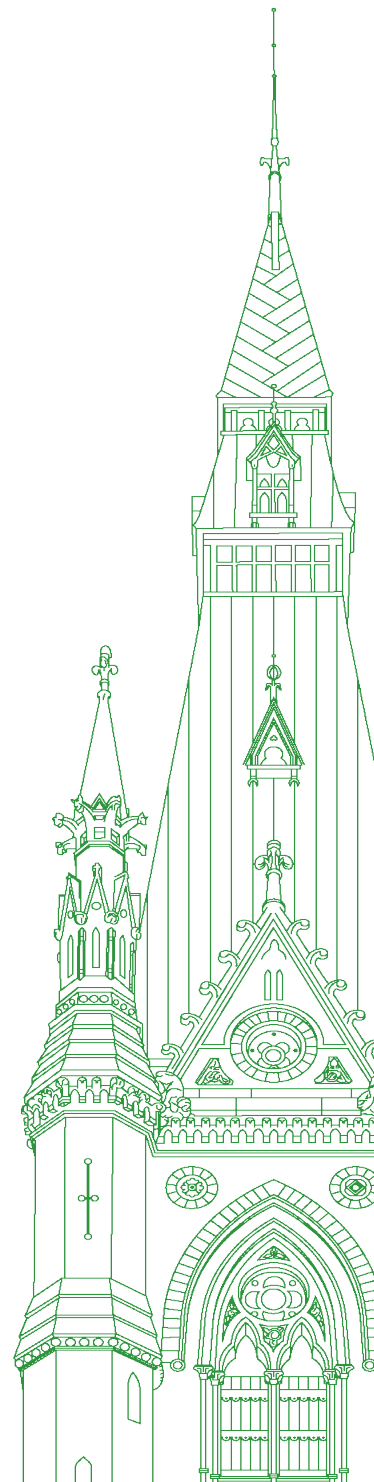
House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 151 No. 080

Thursday, June 2, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 2, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on May 30, 2022, by the member for Perth—Wellington concerning questions related to the Board of Internal Economy in Adjournment Proceedings.

In presenting his question of privilege, the member for Perth—Wellington explained that he had put a question to the chief opposition whip, in his role as a spokesman for the Board of Internal Economy, during Oral Questions on May 16, 2022. Since he was not satisfied with the response, he gave notice of his intention to raise the matter with the whip during Adjournment Proceedings.

[*Translation*]

The Private Members' Business Office, which organizes these debates, then informed him that his notice was inadmissible because, under Standing Order 38(5), only a minister or parliamentary secretary can respond to questions asked during this period.

According to the member, this decision does not take account of an order adopted by the House on October 2, 2001, that indeed allows a spokesperson for the Board of Internal Economy to answer these questions. Even if no such change was made to the Standing Orders, he believes that this order was of a permanent nature. He also argued that the decision to refuse his notice was a breach of his privileges and non-compliance with an order of the House.

[*English*]

First off, since this is a question of interpretation of the Standing Orders and our practice, the matter will be dealt with as a point of order and not a point of privilege.

Fundamentally, what is at issue in the case before us is the nature of the order adopted by unanimous consent on October 2, 2001. Normally, an order is valid for the session under way. When the House wishes to make permanent changes, it normally does so by amending the Standing Orders. In fact, the name of this document, "Standing Orders", expresses this well. These are orders that re-

main in effect from one session to the next. The member did, however, cite examples of orders adopted by the House that, without amending the Standing Orders, were permanent. This was the case with the adoption of the current wording of the prayer and with the designation of a committee for the consideration of certain reports.

[*Translation*]

The recourse of unanimous consent is described thus in the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at pages 591 and 592:

At times, the House may choose to depart from, vary or abridge the rules it has made for itself. When the House has made substantial or permanent modifications to its procedures or practices, it has usually proceeded by way of motion preceded by notice; ad hoc changes, on the other hand, are often made by obtaining the consent of all Members present in the House at the time the departure from the rules or practices is proposed. Such a suspension of the rules or usual practices is accomplished by what is termed "unanimous consent".

The motion adopted on October 2, 2001, that the member cited, began with the words, "notwithstanding any Standing Order", which normally announces a temporary departure from the rules of the House. As such, a question was exceptionally allowed to be answered by a spokesperson for the Board of Internal Economy who is neither a minister nor a parliamentary secretary during Adjournment Proceedings.

• (1010)

[*English*]

By all appearances, the decision was an agreement for the case raised a few days earlier, on September 28, 2001. At that time, everyone agreed that it was an inconsistency in the Standing Orders, an inconsistency that, in the opinion of the Chair, is still there. The solution chosen at the time was a temporary order. In order to make that decision permanent, it should have been worded differently.

In the meantime, if the member for Perth—Wellington wishes the chief opposition whip, one of the spokesmen for the Board of Internal Economy, to be able to answer the question during Adjournment Proceedings, he can ask for the unanimous consent of the House to temporarily depart from the Standing Orders.

Moreover, if the member wishes to suggest a permanent change to Standing Order 38, I invite him to take advantage of the debate on the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees, held pursuant to Standing Order 51, to make the suggestion. He can also raise the matter with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, whose mandate is to guide the House in reviewing the Standing Orders.

I thank all members for their attention.

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The hon. member for Perth—Wellington is rising on a point of order.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, in response to your ruling, I will take your advice. By unanimous consent, I seek that notwithstanding any standing order, a question to the spokesperson for the Board of Internal Economy may be raised during the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order 38, and a spokesperson for the board who is not a minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary may give the response during those proceedings.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

* * *

CERTAIN AMENDMENTS MADE TO BILL C-19

The Speaker: Following the presentation yesterday of the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Finance on Bill C-19, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 7, 2022 and other measures, the Chair wishes to draw the attention of members to a procedural issue related to two amendments adopted by the committee during clause-by-clause study of the bill.

[Translation]

As the House knows, the Speaker does not normally intervene in committee matters. However, in cases where a committee has exceeded its authority, particularly in relation to bills, the Speaker has a responsibility to ensure that certain fundamental rules and practices are properly observed. As Speaker Fraser explained on April 28, 1992, at page 9801 of the Debates:

When a bill is referred to a standing or legislative committee of the House, that committee is only empowered to adopt, amend or negative the clauses found in that piece of legislation and to report the bill to the House with or without amendments. The committee is restricted in its examination in a number of ways. It cannot infringe on the financial initiative of the Crown, ... no matter how tempting that may be.

[English]

The first questionable amendment modified clause 6 of the bill in order to amend the Income Tax Act and allow individuals with type 1 diabetes to automatically qualify for a tax credit. Some uncertainty was raised about whether this amendment required a royal recommendation, and the chair of the committee ruled it inadmissible. This decision was challenged and subsequently overturned. The committee then debated and adopted this amendment.

The second amendment seeks to amend clause 135 of Bill C-19 to modify the select luxury items tax act. With respect to subject aircraft, the coming into force is changed from September 1, 2022, to a day or days to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council. Here again, the chair of the committee ruled the amendment inadmissible because it lacked a needed ways and means motion. This decision was also challenged and overturned, and again the committee then debated the amendment and adopted it.

• (1015)

[Translation]

Both amendments bring up different, but equally important, questions about the admissibility of amendments and their compliance with certain financial procedures. Page 772 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, reminds us that:

Since an amendment may not infringe upon the financial initiative of the Crown, it is inadmissible if it imposes a charge on the public treasury, or if it extends the objects or purposes or relaxes the conditions and qualifications specified in the royal recommendation. An amendment is also inadmissible if it exceeds the scope of the ways and means motion on which a bill is based, or if it imposes a new charge on the people that is not preceded by the adoption of a ways and means motion or not covered by the terms of a ways and means motion already adopted.

[English]

Given the potential consequences rising from these amendments and the way they were considered in committee, the Chair felt it necessary to review the relevant evidence together with the rules relating to financial procedure.

With respect to the first amendment related to clause 6, the Chair is unclear as to how it constitutes a new and distinct charge on the public treasury. In fact, based on the information the Chair has before it, it appears that this amendment allows a tax credit that in its application is non-refundable. Accordingly, while the chair of the committee determined that the amendment required a royal recommendation, I am of the view that it does not need one.

[Translation]

With regard to the amendment to clause 135, the Chair agrees with the committee chair that this amendment, by changing the date of the coming into force of the clause, could oblige certain entities to bear an additional charge. Consequently, given this possibility, this amendment needs to be preceded by a ways and means motion.

[English]

While the Chair appreciates the difficulties that can arise when examining a bill in committee, it is important to remember that a committee must carry out its mandate without exceeding its powers. In the Chair's view, by adopting an amendment that infringes on the financial initiative of the Crown, a committee ventures beyond its powers.

Consequently, the Chair must order that the amendment to clause 135, adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance, be declared null and void, and that the amendment no longer form part of the bill as reported to the House.

I want to thank all members for their attention.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

[Translation]

CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-22, An Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act.

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

* * *

● (1020)

[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 third report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, in relation to Bill S-206, an act to amend the Criminal Code.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

[Translation]

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities entitled “Railway Safety and the Effects of Railway Operations on the Surrounding Communities in which they Operate”.

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

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON BRAIN INJURIES ACT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-277, An Act to establish a national strategy on brain injuries.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in Canada, June is Brain Injury Awareness Month and it is a time to increase awareness about the prevalence of brain injury, the obstacles that exist for those with brain injury and the need for more services and support at all stages of recovery.

The 2022 national collaborative Brain Injury Awareness Month campaign is focused on raising awareness of brain injury in Canada. We know that over 1.5 million Canadians live with brain injury and it contributes to homelessness, incarceration, substance use and mental health issues.

That is why I am very pleased to be introducing this bill today, which would establish a national brain injury strategy. It would require the Minister of Health to develop a national strategy to support and improve brain injury awareness, prevention and treatment,

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as well as the rehabilitation and recovery of persons living with brain injury.

The strategy requires a number of things, like the implementation of preventative measures and identifying the training, education and guidance needs of health care professionals, but it will also identify the challenges resulting from brain injury, such as mental health problems, addiction, housing and homelessness issues, and criminality. The bill would also have reporting requirements so that Parliament can keep tabs on this strategy.

Finally, I would like to thank both Brain Injury Canada and Janelle from my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, who is a member of the Constable Gerald Breese Centre for Traumatic Life Losses, for their collaboration and input, which made this bill today possible.

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

* * *

PREVENTION OF GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED VACCINATION MANDATES ACT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-278, An Act to prevent the imposition by the federal government of vaccination mandates for employment and travel.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am taking another step to give Canadians back control of their lives with the prevention of government-imposed vaccination mandates act.

This bill would ban the government from imposing vaccine mandates as a condition of travel or employment. If the bill passes, the government would no longer be able to require federal workers to get vaccinated in order to keep their paycheques and jobs. It would also ban the federal government from requiring vaccines in order for people to travel. In other words, it would allow all Canadians, regardless of their personal medical decisions, to continue to work in the federal sector or travel on trains, planes and other federally regulated modes of transportation, regardless of whether they are vaccinated.

We are an outlier here in Canada today. Most countries have removed mandates for travel, including the U.K., Germany, Italy, Thailand, Poland, Argentina, Chile and many others. All provinces have now removed vaccine mandates. The five big banks have done likewise, and public sector unions have even begun legal actions to remove these discriminatory mandates.

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I have met countless people and heard endless tragic stories of people separated from family members by their inability to get on an airplane or people languishing without a paycheque, despite having a spotless track record serving their employer over many years. These mandates have become nothing more than a cruel attempt to demonize a small minority. They are absolutely unnecessary and without any scientific basis.

I call on all members of Parliament to end this discrimination and give people back control of their own personal medical decisions and their bodies by passing this bill banning the federal government from imposing these mandates and allowing Canadians to take back control of their lives.

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

● (1025)

[Translation]

The Speaker: We will now proceed to consideration of the motion moved by the member for La Prairie.

Mr. Therrien moves that it be an instruction to the Standing Committee—

The member for La Prairie is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

We were supposed to be able to introduce a bill from my colleague, the member for Rivière-du-Nord. It seems that the Chair did not call his bill, and I am wondering if it would be possible to do that.

The Speaker: It is not on my list, but I will check with the table and see if there is a change.

[English]

There seems to have been an oversight.

[Translation]

There was a small problem because the motion was not there. Since we have moved on to the next rubric, I will have to seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to the introduction of private members' bills.

Do we have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

● (1030)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-279, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal organizations).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce this bill today because, as we in the Bloc Québécois often say, it is in keeping with the interests and values of our citizens.

As everyone knows, there is currently a significant spike in gun violence throughout America and, for us in Canada, particularly in the Montreal area. Again last night, a man was shot at point blank

range in a restaurant at 7:30 p.m., at dinner time, in front of children.

This situation has gone on day after day. There are new such incidents every day, and it is Parliament's responsibility to do something about this. The federal government is responsible for the Criminal Code, and provisions must be put in place quickly, because this cannot go on.

Bill C-279 seeks to give the Minister of Public Safety the authority to establish a list of criminal organizations that individuals will be prohibited from joining under the Criminal Code. This will help make the work of police and the courts easier.

Right now, when the authorities want to put someone who is accused of belonging to a criminal organization on trial, not only do they have to prove that the accused belongs to the organization, but they also have to prove that the organization in question is a criminal organization. That is the kind of proof that can often take weeks or even months to provide.

Bill C-279 would provide for the creation of a list of criminal organizations, much like what is already being done for terrorist organizations. There are currently about 30 to 50 organizations listed as terrorist organizations. The same thing would be done for criminal organizations. This would make it easier to fight organized crime, it would help curb the flow of illegal firearms as much as possible, and it would hopefully put an end to the shootings on our streets.

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

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, welcome back. I would like to mention to those assembled and the people listening at home that when one asks for unanimous consent to accept a change in the schedule, that is actually what unanimous consent votes are for, as opposed to bringing a treaty before the House that has been unseen by many of the members, voting on it and going forward without so much as debate. I thank you very much for once again pointing out and using a unanimous consent motion for what it was intended.

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member, and I want to remind hon. members what unanimous consent is all about. I encourage anyone seeking unanimous consent to actually go and do the groundwork beforehand, so by the time the members come to the chamber, they have had discussions and we know that we have unanimous consent.

* * *

● (1035)

[Translation]

**INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS REGARDING BILL
C-14**

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ) moved:

That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that, during its consideration of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (electoral representation), the committee be granted the power to expand the scope of the bill in order to amend the formula for apportioning seats in the House and include provisions that maintain the Quebec nation's political weight, as the House of Commons recognized on March 2, 2022.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-14 originally provided that no province would lose any federal ridings in the next electoral redistribution. Let us not forget that the future configuration of Parliament threatened to remove one riding from Quebec, which would have seen its number of seats in the House drop from 78 to 77. The Bloc Québécois obviously let it be known that this was outrageous.

We are now moving this motion of instruction for the following reason. It is true that we do not want to see a decrease in the number of members from Quebec in the House, but we want to go even further by asking for an end to the relative decrease in Quebec's political weight, which has been happening since the start of the 20th century.

Since this bill is already too restrictive to allow for these kinds of amendments, we are forced to propose amendments through a motion of instruction to ensure that it is in order. In this way, Bill C-14 would become embedded in the parliamentary journey we set out on in June 2021.

Allow me to recap. Last year, in June 2021, we moved the following motion:

That the House agree...that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

This motion was adopted by the vast majority of members in the House, which was the first step in this legislative journey.

Since that first step, Quebec has not been seen as a province like the others. It is seen as a nation, which we have known for a long time. However, if Quebec is a nation, it should have the same powers afforded to nations. We must therefore take action to protect the Quebec nation, whose common language is French, which is something that a very large majority of members recognized.

The second step was taken in March, when, once again, a large majority of members in the House adopted the following motion, which I will read because it is very important:

That, in the opinion of the House:

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

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Jonquière on a point of order.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, could our colleagues please move their conversations somewhere outside the House?

Even though I am next to the member for La Prairie, I cannot hear what he is saying.

The Speaker: That is a good point. If members wish to chat, I would ask them to find a place to have their conversation rather than talking back and forth across the House. They can continue their conversation in the lobby and whisper, or even go out into the hallway or lobby.

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[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, it is a point well taken by my Quebec colleague. I was just a little thrown off. I thought we were going to be having a debate here on Standing Order 51. As a member of PROC, it took me by surprise that there is this new motion before us to talk about something that I thought would be dealt with at committee.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, my father always said that good things come to those who wait, and my colleague will have to wait. I am sorry that my voice does not carry far, but my colleague was told that this motion would be moved and that I would speak for four or five minutes. Since my time has not yet expired, he should pay close attention. He may learn something.

There were two parts to the motion. The number of members from Quebec cannot be reduced, and the proportion of Quebec members in the House cannot be reduced. Those were the two aspects to this motion, and the vast majority of members voted in favour.

Bill C-14 is a step forward. The number of members from Quebec will not be reduced. Confucius said that even the longest journey always begins with a first step. The is the first step.

What we are asking for is the second step. That is obvious. Everyone here, or almost everyone here, has said that they cannot allow Quebec, which is a nation with French as its common language, to have its relative political weight in the House reduced.

The point of this motion of instruction is to allow the Bloc Québécois to table an amendment to Bill C-14 so that we can finally carry out the mission provided for in the motion tabled in March. That is the bare minimum. The House needs to finally understand that we are not talkers, but doers. That is what I am asking the House to do.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting the manner in which we are having this debate today, and I will be able to expand on that during my comments, but I will say that, when the commission came down indicating that it was looking at reducing the number of seats in the province of Quebec from 78 to 77, the reaction in the Government of Canada, the Liberal caucus, was very swift. We indicated that it could not happen and that we did not support the reduction of the number of seats in the province of Quebec. It was universally felt within the government that it was something that was not acceptable. That is the reason why we have Bill C-14.

I will get the opportunity to expand upon that point when I get the opportunity to address the motion. Historically we have witnessed, whether it is Prince Edward Island or out west, there have been guarantees of numbers. What are the member's thoughts on previous guarantees that were put in place to ensure that jurisdictions would not lose the number of members of Parliament they had?

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]*

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. Yes, there are guarantees. In particular, there is the senatorial clause, which gives Prince Edward Island four members instead of one, and the grandfather clause. It is true.

That precedent is the reason we are proposing a new clause. Since there are already several clauses, we simply want to add a “Quebec clause” to make sure that Quebec always has 25% of the number of seats in the House of Commons.

That is in line with the remarks of my colleague from Winnipeg North.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the motion tabled by the Bloc Québécois House leader. I think that the motion of instruction highlights the important work that the House standing committees do. I trust the committee members to decide what type of motion and amendment regarding Bill C-14 they might introduce.

I would also like to remind my colleagues that the substance of Bill C-14 comes, as I believe, from the motion moved in early March by the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable. His motion sought unanimous consent to ensure that no province in this country loses a single seat.

I do not really have any questions for the hon. member for La Prairie. I simply wanted to address these remarks to the House and say that I think the motion is reasonable.

• (1045)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, all that remains for me to do is to thank my colleague for his words of wisdom and, as always, commend him for the quality of his French. It is impressive. I would like to thank him.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised at the question that has been implied by the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party seems to be taking the position that one of the ways in which we can expand the scope of legislation is to just bring forward a motion that enables any committee on any piece of legislation to say it would like to go in this direction or that direction. Then, by using a vote in the House, we give a different type of mandate to our standing committees.

I am wondering if this is the principle that the members of the Bloc would advocate for, whether here in the Parliament of Canada or in the parliament of Quebec. Would that very same principle apply so we should be encouraging these types of motions? I am not talking about the motion itself as much as the principle of having a motion that would enable legislation to be changed in committees on the issue of scope. That is one of the reasons why we have standing orders, which are technically what we were supposed to be debating today.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, when I got up this morning, I do not know why, but I had a feeling that it was going to be a big day. Now I know why. I just got a second question from my col-

league from Winnipeg North. It is enough to wear a body out, but I thank him anyway.

The ability of parliamentary committees to amend bills is a basic rule of the parliamentary system. I did not make it up. We are all here to work on amendments and improve bills so they better reflect what the people of Canada and Quebec want.

In this particular case, it is all about Quebec. Everybody knows that the point of Bill C-14 is to make sure Quebec does not lose any seats, so it makes sense to listen to what Quebec wants. Since the purpose of this bill is for Quebec to improve its political prospects within the House of Commons, for as long as we are here, we might as well go all in and get the job done properly.

I listened to my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North, which I always enjoy doing, but let me read part of the motion he voted for: “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 voted in favour of that.

He needs to explain why he does seem to comprehend that Bill C-14 includes a section to satisfy Quebecers.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to understand the motion's significance.

First of all, I see that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could be given the ability to make more significant amendments to Bill C-14.

In that case, would the Bloc Québécois potentially accept a motion to guarantee sufficient powers for the province of British Columbia? As members know, British Columbia does not have enough seats in the House.

Will the Bloc Québécois support my province and its powers?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and commend the quality of his French. He told me once that he learned some of that French in Quebec, and that comes through in his strength and passion. We are very pleased to hear it.

If he thinks British Columbia should have more seats, then let him go through all the same steps we did. He needs to start by saying that British Columbia is a nation. Then we will discuss why it may or may not be a nation. That is what I am wondering. Is British Columbia a nation? We can discuss that at length, but I do know one thing: Quebec is a nation.

When Félix Leclerc died, the member did not know who he was, while Quebec was mourning his loss. I could come up with a whole list of reasons for why Quebec is a nation. I could talk about it all day.

If my colleague can do that with British Columbia, then let him put it to a vote in the House and we can talk about it again later.

• (1050)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about the Alberta nation.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is not a joke, Mr. Speaker. We have a distinct culture, different festivals. We use the same language as some other parts of the country, just like Quebec uses the same language as some other parts of the world.

Does the member agree with me that Alberta is a nation and has the right to be recognized as such?

This is not a joke. It is very serious.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his excellent French. We have reached the point where Alberta is a nation.

British Columbia is a nation, Alberta is a nation. We can settle this right now. Why do we not all separate and form a confederation of sovereign states?

We could share an economic space, keep the same currency and each have our own country. Rather than arguing about what divides us, we could meet to talk about what unites us.

I say yes to the sovereignty of Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec with a shared economic space. *Vive le Québec libre.*

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting exchange of ideas, particularly during the questions and answers, and in the way Bloc members have this dogged attitude of pursuing their ultimate objective, which is the breakup of Canada.

I see Canada as a great nation. In fact, around the world, we see a great demand from people wanting to come to Canada, and I believe it is because of our diversity. The diversity we have to offer the world is second to none.

In terms of observing what is taking place during the five or 10 minutes of questions and answers, it emboldens me to point out why it is so important that we have a government that governs all of Canada. It is working with the provinces, territories and indigenous leaders, and continues, as we saw during the pandemic, to work with many stakeholders. In the House of Commons, we have a government that is very sensitive to the needs of the different regions and provinces, and I saw that in terms of the Electoral Commission.

I made reference to this in my question to the member from the Bloc. When the Electoral Commission came out suggesting that the province of Quebec would lose a seat, the reaction was immediate for members of the Liberal caucus, and it was from all of us. We did not have to be from the province, even though I would argue that my colleagues from Quebec were quite boisterous about it, to realize how important it was that the province of Quebec did not lose a seat. This was quickly understood and shared with many in

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the public and within this chamber. The member referred to a vote I participated in, where I voted in the affirmative and showed my support for Quebec to not lose a seat.

I have spoken in the past about the province of Quebec, which is where my ancestral heritage comes from, both on my mother's and father's sides. For generations, my family grew up in and, I would suggest, helped pioneer Quebec. I have a great passion for the province. It also happens to have my second-favourite hockey team: the Montreal Canadiens.

That aside, I recognize the importance of representation, and the fine work that Elections Canada and the commission have done over the years. As we try to understand what is going to be taking place today in terms of the actual debate, it appears that we have the Bloc party working with the Conservative party, and no, I am not dreaming this. It seems as if the Conservative Party is going to be supporting the motion. It will be a blue and light-blue coalition on this particular issue to see it go to committee. I can tell members that this concerns me in a number of ways.

Are we now seeing the stage be set so that when the government is able to pass legislation, we will see future changes be proposed by the double-blue saying that those members want to widen the scope on this legislation that has now passed into second reading?

An hon. member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, a member from the Bloc asks, "Why not?" I think that we need to be aware of that fact.

• (1055)

What is interesting is this. I suspect that the Conservatives, based on what I witnessed when I was here for second reading of the bill, do not support what the Bloc is proposing to do at committee. In principle, though, it would appear that they are going to support the initiative moving forward to committee. Maybe the coalition on that side has come to an agreement on it, but we will have to wait and see. If I were to wager a quarter, my quarter says it is the double-blue coalition that will attempt to get this to committee.

I have a problem with that. I have a problem because, at the end of the day, where is it going to stop? We have seen how difficult it is for the government to get legislation through the House of Commons, the chamber, because the Conservative opposition members have taken the approach that it does not matter what the legislation is, whether they support it or they do not support it. Unless the government is prepared to bring in time allocation, it is not going to pass going to committee.

I do not know. I did not do the research on this, but I suspect we might have even had to bring in time allocation on Bill C-14. I do not know that for sure. What I can say is that we now have debate on that bill resurfacing. We are now going to be debating Bill C-14 all over again today because the Bloc wants to have something instituted in it that the members kind of sense, perhaps with accuracy, goes beyond its scope during committee proceedings. At the commission, the commissioners have responsibilities. They have deadlines. They need to meet those deadlines. I think the Conservatives are enabling the Bloc to cause even more confusion within the province of Quebec in regard to meeting some of those deadlines.

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The commission came down with numbers. We disagreed and we made an amendment, because we all recognized the value of Quebec not losing a seat. That was unanimous inside this chamber, or at least I believe it was. That sent a fairly significant message to Quebec. I believe it enabled the people of Quebec to better understand and appreciate that, as we go through this process, there are independent commissioners.

The province of Manitoba, for example, is already redrawing the boundaries. The boundaries will be coming out. I am not exactly sure on what day they will be coming out, but they have already looked for public consultation on the 14 ridings in the province of Manitoba and then there will be dialogue and public input. For the province of Quebec, if the commission listens to what has been taking place in the House, it could anticipate that there will be 78 seats to readjust the boundaries with, but there is no guarantee until the legislation passes. That is why we encouraged members, when we were debating Bill C-14, to pass the legislation. By passing the legislation and pushing it through, we are enabling the commission in Quebec to finalize the boundaries.

• (1100)

Now, with what appears to be the support of the Conservative Party, the Bloc at least has found a way to cause some potential mischief in committees. From our perspective, and I would like to think a majority perspective, we not only want the province of Quebec not to lose a seat, but we want to ensure that the commission is able to provide the report that is going to respond to what the people of Quebec want to see in terms of boundary alignments, which is absolutely critical. It is all part of the process. There are deadlines that have to be met that will ultimately see these new boundaries take effect in the next federal election.

I can say first-hand how important that process is in Winnipeg North. Ten years ago, when there were modifications to the boundaries in Winnipeg North, what was proposed was far different from what it is today. In fact, Amber Trails was not in Winnipeg North at all. A good portion of The Maples was excluded, and there we are talking about 10,000-plus people who were excluded from what today is in Winnipeg North. The expansion went north of McPhillips, all the way up to between Kingsbury and Inkster Boulevard. It was completely different from what it is today.

As part of the process, a presentation was provided that included the boundary maps. The public received it and responded, and because of the response provided by the public, the boundaries were dramatically changed, in Winnipeg North at the very least. It had an impact on the ridings of Kildonan—St. Paul and Winnipeg North, which today includes 85% of Amber Trails and all of The Maples. Those communities were clustered back into Winnipeg North.

I say that because I think we need to give more respect to the Province of Quebec and the commission and the fine work that, no doubt, they will be doing. With the riding changes in the city of Montreal, I suspect we will see a number of streets being changed, or in Quebec City or rural municipalities. We have to recognize that the reason this happens in the first place is because of shifting populations and increases in population. Manitoba, for example, is a whole lot more urban today than it was 30 years ago. At the provincial legislature at one time, there was a larger number of seats from

rural Manitoba than from the city of Winnipeg. Today, there are more MLAs in Winnipeg than in rural Manitoba, but that is strictly urban-rural. That is not to mention that some rural communities grow more than other rural communities. The population decreases and increases.

The same principle applies to the province of Quebec. Manitoba's population has grown from 1.15 million to close to 1.3 million. The numbers remain relatively the same in terms of the number of seats because there is a guarantee, as has been referenced even by the Bloc. We have taken that into consideration. The best example is the province of Prince Edward Island. When Prince Edward Island came into Confederation, it had four seats. Part of the Constitution says that it retains those four seats.

• (1105)

It is actually the number of senators. Do not quote me on that, but I believe that is what it is. There is a constitutional agreement that enables—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It is in Hansard.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, if it is in Hansard it is true. There is a constitutional agreement that enables Prince Edward Island to retain that minimum number of seats. The same principle applies in other jurisdictions. We have three territories to the north, each one having a representative. Who in the chamber would deny that representation?

Clearly, we have seen the types of changes put into place that Bill C-14 is attempting to do, so why add confusion? That is why Elections Canada is charged with ensuring that we have a fair and equitable system. We have the commission, which in a very apolitical fashion comes up with the actual numbers.

When it came up with the number for Quebec, as I pointed out, it was for a wide variety of reasons, the French language being one of them. There is an island of French or francophone uniqueness in North America in the province of Quebec. I am very proud of that fact. I might not have the ability to speak French, but I can still care for the language. It is a part of my personal heritage. I am very proud of the French language. I encourage it in Winnipeg North. I am always amazed when I see immigrants, especially first-generation immigrants, whether of Filipino, Punjabi or Indo-Canadian heritage, who can speak Punjabi, English and French or Tagalog, English and French. I am very proud of the fact that we are a bilingual country.

In the province of Quebec, French is the spoken language, and we have seen how the Minister of Canadian Heritage, many of my Quebec colleagues, and those far beyond appreciate just how important the French language is, not only to the province of Quebec but to all of Canada. It speaks to our diversity. That is why, when the announcement was made that there would be a reduction in the number of seats in Quebec, the reaction within the Liberal caucus, from the Prime Minister to the ministers to the caucus as a whole, was quite swift. In a relatively short period of time, we saw legislation brought forward and introduced and brought to second reading. Then, I suspect through time allocation, it will go to committee stage. We want to see the legislation pass. The need for 78 seats as the bare minimum is something all members appreciate, from what I understand. If it were up to me, I would like to see not only the French language increase, but also the French population.

At the end of the day, I would hope that members will value the independence and fine work that Elections Canada and our commissions have done and allow the people of Quebec to have that full public discussion with the commission with respect to the communities that will make up the federal ridings that are going to represent the people of Quebec here in Ottawa.

• (1110)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am troubled in this debate, although there has been unanimous support for Bill C-14. I think we have responded positively right across all party lines to the concerns of our Quebec colleagues that the voice of Quebec would be reduced within this place.

[Translation]

Obviously, we support the idea of measures to protect Quebec's number of seats in the House.

[English]

At the same time, as someone who was elected in 2011 when we had 308 MPs here, I have a larger concern. We are now at 338. Do we constantly expand the number of members of Parliament we have? In the U.K., they have 650-some MPs. Is it really better representation for our constituents that as the population expands, there are more voices? Does that not dilute the voice of each riding if we have more MPs? In a chamber of 650, very few people out of the whole number get to contribute to the debate.

I would rather see, and I put this to the hon. member, fair voting in this country through proportional representation and through limiting the constant growth in the number of MPs. In other words, in the concept of representation by population, we actually may not have better democracy, compared to actually fixing our voting system to have real democracy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. When I reflect on it, the number of members of Parliament does weigh heavily on my mind personally. What we ultimately want to see is all members of Parliament having a very important role in the chamber. I suspect that if we started to have numbers like 400 or 500, it could diminish.

The way in which we increase or provide services as the population continues to grow is by enhancing the resources that members of Parliament have. For example, members' allowances or their ac-

cess to finances could be enhanced so that members of Parliament could better serve their constituents. We have seen that if MPs have more resources to serve their constituents, they are able to serve a larger number of people.

What I am glad and grateful for hearing in the member's comments is that the member supports retaining the 78 seats for Quebec. I do appreciate that, because I was not 100% sure, and that is why I could not say that it was unanimous in the House of Commons.

Based on what the member has just said, I am more confident that it is unanimously felt inside the House of Commons today that the Province of Quebec will retain 78 seats at the very least as a base mark here in the House of Commons. I see that as a positive thing, as a commitment to *la belle province*, a province that all of us no doubt care deeply about and that plays such an important role within our federation.

• (1115)

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during your time speaking, you mentioned the importance of Quebec and the French language to Winnipeg. Perhaps you could expand on that and talk about how important the feeling is that various communities in Manitoba have toward Quebec.

I know that in northern Ontario, places like Dubreuilville or Sturgeon Falls, which are predominantly French, support a lot of what is happening in Quebec. They basically see it as the motherland that they emigrated from, and they see a very strong, united Canada with Quebec in it.

Could you please expand on the feelings of Winnipeg towards maintaining or grandfathering these 78 seats for Quebec?

The Deputy Speaker: First of all, I know the member for Kingston and the Islands would stand and make sure on a point of order that we run all our questions through the Chair and not use "you" and speak directly to the member, but since he is not here, I thought I would do that myself and remind folks to run comments through the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the connections that take place interprovincially are truly amazing.

I reference my own heritage from the province, along the St. Lawrence. My great-great-great-grandparents came from that region and moved out to St-Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba. From there, they went to St. Boniface, which became a part of the city of Winnipeg.

The St. Boniface community and many rural communities in Manitoba have very strong ties to the province of Quebec. One thing that holds that tie so closely is the French language. When things take place in the province of Quebec, whether it is an ice storm or the Olympics of many years ago, there is always interest from my home province of Manitoba. There are strong ties between people, and that is one of the nice things about the federation. I believe no matter where we go, we will always find those types of connections.

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The general feeling I get is that people are very proud of other aspects of Canada, and I do not think anyone who has that passion for Quebec would want to see Quebec lose a House of Commons seat. Equally, I do not think the Province of Quebec or the people of Quebec would want to see Manitoba lose a seat when we look at electoral boundary changes.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too share some of the views of my colleague here in the House. I know the French language is extremely important across the entire country. I have four grandchildren who are enrolled in French immersion programs, and they are there because their parents and I as a grandparent encouraged them to do so. One of the things I regret is I did not have the opportunity to study French when I was in school, or at university, for that matter.

In my view as an MP in Ottawa, the French language today is extremely important. For example, the mayor of Blanc Sablon in Labrador was at a transport committee meeting talking about the fixed link from Newfoundland to Labrador, which is a tunnel that would be a great project to connect Labrador and the island portion of Newfoundland. The important part of that is that the mayor is French, and of course the north shore is very much French, and the people feel like they are losing their identity to a certain extent. They were there in support of that kind of project, because they want to see the highway to Quebec finished and they want to keep that connection. In fact, they want to grow that connection.

I strongly supported them, and I still do, in chasing that kind of project. It is important to them and to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We talk about the balance we need when we talk about the numbers of seats in the House. I ask the member if indeed what we see is a fair balance.

• (1120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member amplifies the issue of what I think would be a wonderful debate, which is the French language, where it is at and how that language builds our nation in a very positive way. Many different communities from coast to coast to coast are brought together by the French language.

In terms of Election Canada and Bill C-14, it is one of the reasons we had the reaction we did in the Liberal caucus. We want to ensure Quebec has that 78-floor base so that it can never go below that, and I see that as a positive.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member for Winnipeg North, who I find very interesting and enjoy hearing from.

I do not mean to insult him, but I noticed something in his presentation that I see frequently and that I would describe as “predatory federalism”. I apologize for using that phrase, but it means that the Quebec nation and the French language are great as long as they remain a quaint curiosity.

If we look back in history, we have seen this predatory federalism on several occasions. I could even go back to the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, which could have led to Quebec being recog-

nized, since Canada was supposed to be a bilingual and bicultural country. However, the federalists got scared and resorted to predatory federalism. They thought that if they granted recognition to Quebec, they would have a problem later on because that recognition could be leveraged for political power. That is why they went with multiculturalism instead.

That was the first time Quebec was rejected, but it was far from the last. Just think of Meech Lake or Charlottetown. Every time Quebec has asked for the political power to which it is entitled as a nation, the federalists have said no and invoked what I call “predatory federalism”. It goes without saying that Quebec is trying to protect itself in response to that.

If they recognize us as a nation, why not give us the power and the potential that belong to a nation? I would remind my colleague from Winnipeg North that this assembly was once prepared to recognize Quebec's political power by giving it 25% of the seats in the Charlottetown accord. Unfortunately, that accord was never adopted because people got scared, as my colleague explained earlier.

I do not see why he is afraid to add a Quebec clause to Bill C-14. I do not know what scares him about that prospect, other than the fact that it would give Quebec a certain recognition. I believe that is clear enough. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That this question be now put.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, just for clarification, we will get 10 minutes for questions and comments and then I will be able to speak for a full 20 minutes, I understand.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing that comes to my mind is, why the hurry? The Bloc has brought forward a motion, and what they are suggesting is that we stop the debate on it when there is so much more we can talk about with regard to Elections Canada, the role it plays and the possible options. There are other things that can be addressed.

In my opening comments, I was dealing more with specifics. There are other aspects to Elections Canada. On the one hand, the Bloc is bringing forward this motion asking for us to have a debate on it so it can go to committee, and then right away they want to have a vote on it.

Does the member not want to hear what other members have to say about what the Bloc is proposing to do today?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is asking why we are in such a hurry. Simply put, we have been waiting a long time for the Quebec nation to be recognized.

Earlier, I was talking about the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, which was in 1963, if I am not mistaken. It proved to be a failure for us. Then, in 1982, the Quebec nation suffered another setback with the patriation of the Constitution. Then there was Meech Lake and Charlottetown, two more disappointments for the Quebec nation. Then came a referendum, and we were so close to achieving our destiny. In the end, our victory was stolen, perhaps by the sponsorship program, which my colleague may have heard about.

I do not know about him, but we are losing patience, which is perhaps why we are acting quickly.

● (1130)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for clarification. Today's procedures are little different.

Is the Bloc Québécois MPs' goal to have a vote right away or another day, with or without debate?

I just want clarification as to the procedure for what the Bloc Québécois is asking for at this point.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, the procedure is very straightforward. We want this assembly to vote on the motion moved by my colleague. It is as simple as that.

We can talk about it now. We spent an entire day doing so. As members know, there was an opposition day about Quebec's political weight during which we discussed an issue similar to this morning's issue. The House had a chance to vote then.

This is very simple. We want this assembly to vote. It is as simple as that. We do this all day long.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that when I posed the question to the member, right away he made reference to the Constitution. What he is talking about, from his perspective, is that the Bloc would like to have a discussion about the Constitution. I am wondering why that is. I did not even talk at length at all about the Constitution. Whether it was the constitutional agreements that were achieved in the 1970s, the Charlottetown accord or the Meech Lake accord, these are all no doubt important debates, but is it the position of the Bloc today that we should have a constitutional debate?

To the best I can tell, even people in the province of Quebec, like the residents of Winnipeg North, do not want to be talking about the Constitution. What they want to be talking about is Canada's economy. They want to be talking about the pandemic.

I am wondering if my friend could share with the House whether he agrees with me and the government that the priority today is not constitutional change. The priority today is how we can deliver better quality long-term health care and how we can ensure we are creating and supporting the many different industries, such as the aerospace industry, which is so important to the province of Quebec and the province of Manitoba. To me, that is what the legislature should be talking about. That is where the focus of the Bloc party should be, if it wants to be constructive in what it is doing inside the House of Commons. If Bloc members do not want to be con-

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structive and want to be destructive, I suggest maybe they should continue along the line of constitutional debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I find the hon. member for Winnipeg North's approach very interesting.

Actually, I am not the only one to mention the Constitution. Earlier this week, we spoke about Bill 21 on state secularism.

His colleague from Mont-Royal said that the notwithstanding clause should never be applied. However, it is part of the Constitution. Does this colleague not respect his voters, since he talks about the Constitution and says the notwithstanding clause should never be applied?

I spoke earlier of predatory federalism. When it suits them to put Quebec in its place, saying that the notwithstanding clause should be removed, saying that it is not up to Quebec to decide how to manage secularism, the Liberals talk to us about the Constitution. When it comes to Bill 96 to protect the French language, the Liberals are ready to talk about the Constitution and to say that they do not want to hear about the notwithstanding clause.

However, when it comes to recognizing the Quebec nation as we ask, talking about the Constitution is like talking about a shameful disease.

They need to make up their minds. My colleague from Winnipeg North's remarks are not in line with what his colleagues and the people in his own party are saying.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I think that we have made an effort here, step by step, and I am concerned. I have no problem with the idea. In fact, we voted in favour of protecting the number of members from Quebec.

However, the idea of having percentage representation is based on another principle entirely. It is not the same thing as in Bill C-14. I think that this involves the Constitution.

We debated for an entire day, as the hon. member pointed out. However, the principle proposed in today's motion is different. We have not had a chance to review it and discuss it.

I think I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North. He is right when he says that this involves the Constitution.

● (1135)

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer my colleague by saying that informed politicians who are familiar with Quebec and Canadian politics would know that we have been talking about these issues for more than 50 years. At some point we need to stop debating; we need to do something.

We are moving this motion today. I do not think it is illegitimate or irrational to ask that a nation like the Quebec nation be ensured 25% representation in the House for the time it remains in Canada. I do not think that this is unreasonable. As I said earlier, it was part of the Charlottetown Accord. We talked about it on our opposition day.

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The hon. member for Winnipeg North often uses closure these days to say that we must move things forward. This is the Bloc's answer to that. It is the Bloc's closure. We want to move our issues forward. I invite my colleagues to look at it that way, in a spirit of friendship and cordiality.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing is the real motivation behind this: The Bloc wants to have a debate on the Constitution. If the Bloc members are so gung-ho on debating an issue that Canadians do not want to deal with today, why do they not just introduce it as an opposition day motion and make very clear that they want to talk about the Constitution, as opposed to trying to do it through a back door?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point out to my colleague from Winnipeg North that he and I are the only ones debating the Constitution. The motion is specifically about Quebec's political weight, not the Constitution. I would also point out that it was his party that raised the constitutional issue by saying that the notwithstanding clause should not be used. It was his party that raised this, not me.

If my colleague wants to be consistent, he should also be talking about secularism, and not the notwithstanding clause.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the debate, even though at the beginning of the day, many colleagues from both sides of the House anticipated that we would be engaging in a debate on the Standing Orders. Every election cycle there is a date set aside when members can give their opinions on changes to our rules and how we can enhance opportunities to make the chamber more effective, whether it is in the chamber or at committees.

That is technically what we are supposed to be debating today. After going through motions we went on to petitions. I know that some of my colleagues had petitions to bring forward. Then we were meant to go into the Standing Orders debate. I was prepared to speak to the Standing Orders, but now we find that the Bloc has found a way to bring back a debate on Bill C-14 to the floor of the House of Commons, a debate that we have already had. We already debated Bill C-14 in the House of Commons.

It would appear that Bloc members, with the support of the Conservative Party of Canada, are trying to push forward this motion. I am going to know when the vote occurs, but I am speculating my quarter on the fact that the Conservatives and the Bloc have already negotiated this as a part of their double blue coalition. What we will see is an attempt to get this motion passed. When they do that—

• (1140)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite cannot impute motives or attribute words to other colleagues without evi-

dence. All he is doing right now is spewing rhetoric and making some pretty big assumptions about what is going to happen—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. member for his intervention.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let me enlighten the member. When we first began this discussion, the Conservative Party somewhat indicated that it was sympathetic and would like to see it pass. Then we had another member who seemed to be upset with it asking why we would want it to go to committee. There might be some confusion among the Conservative ranks on this, but I could be wrong in my speculation.

However, from what I can see, we have the double blue. The nice thing is they are still the dark blue versus the light blue. At the end of the day, it would appear as if they are coming together to see this thing go to committee if, in fact, they can get it to committee.

I say that because the member moved the motion to say that the vote now be heard and then there was some dialogue that occurred after that. Through that dialogue, we get a better picture of what it is the Bloc really wants to talk about. We saw that. It was the member who raised the issue. I just responded to it.

Constitutional change is what the member from the Bloc has raised. They talk about the need for some of the things that the Bloc would like to see take place, and they would require a constitutional change. Let me suggest to my Bloc friends that Canadians, as a whole, no matter where they live, whether it is Manitoba, Quebec or any other jurisdiction in Canada, do not want the government to have talks about the Constitution. It is just not anywhere on the political agenda.

That is the nice thing about Bill C-14. Bill C-14 will do what every member in the House, from what I understand, wants to see happen, and that is that the province of Quebec not lose a seat, maintaining at minimum 78 seats. In its own mischievous way, the Bloc wants to raise the issue of the Constitution.

As much as the Bloc may want to focus its attention in the chamber on that issue, I can assure people who might be following the debate, or just following the proceedings in the House day by day, that no matter what the Conservative-Bloc coalition comes up with, whether it is character assassination, constitutional debates or whatever else, the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister will remain focused on the issues that are important to Canadians.

On the specific issue of Bill C-14, which this motion is dealing with, the Prime Minister has been very clear, through the minister and the entire Liberal caucus, that the baseline is 78 seats.

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There is a lot more on the government agenda than Bill C-14. I suspect we are not going to spend our future resources on issues such as constitutional debates over the next 12 months. Canadians are getting through the pandemic. Industries are looking for employees. Concerns are there in the many departments the federal government deals with on a daily basis. Those are the issues that are of critical importance.

• (1145)

Bill C-14 deals with one aspect, and that is the boundary redistribution commission and the report it made public not that long ago indicating the number of seats. I have been around for a few years, and Elections Canada, as an institution, is recognized around the world for the fine work it does. In fact, if we take a look at many other countries around the world, we will find that Elections Canada is often sourced and appealed to in order to assist other countries conduct their elections. A part of that status is that sense of independence, whether it is the creation of the election boundary commissions, the election commissioner, the Elections Act or the putting in place an actual election.

In fact, I made a suggestion earlier today referencing the sense of pride Canadians have in being a bilingual country with both French and English. No matter what region of the country we go to, there is equally a need for us to look at ways in which we can enrich Elections Canada's ability to ultimately not only make changes to boundaries indirectly, but also allow for wider participation in the elections.

When I made the suggestion about languages and having that as a topic on an opposition day, I thought it would have been a wonderful thing to see take place, but in a positive way. The Bloc seems to have a negative twist to things, and its members do not necessarily recognize the true value of Canada's diversity, but I think there is a positive way we could have that debate. I would equally like to see a debate on this if opposition members are looking for other areas in which they can explore and have these types of discussions about Elections Canada and ways we can enhance Elections Canada's role during election periods.

There are many different things we can do with elections. I have participated in debates on PROC, both on boundaries and on election reform, and I know there is a very keen interest in both areas. People understand why we have to have these commissions. These commissions are necessary because of shifting populations. All levels of government have them.

Within the legislation, we often will find variances that take place. For example, in the Province of Manitoba, it is rural versus urban. I have made reference to the fact that at one time we had more rural seats, which were outside the perimeter, than we did within the City of Winnipeg, and now that has changed. However, there are rules that enable rural representation to, in certain areas, have a lower number of voters or population. If we take a look at average populations, we will often find that we might get some at the lower end in rural communities.

I have spoken to commissioners before, and the types of things they have to take into consideration when making the decisions on boundary redistribution are not as simple as drawing a line on a

map wherever there are waterways and major streets. It is far from that.

• (1150)

I recall a discussion with a board member on a commission, it was a provincial one, where he indicated that they have to also factor in rapid-growth communities. These are the areas where they anticipate there is going to be a lot of growth, so they do not want to go much above the average, knowing full well that a particular area will continue to grow at an exponential pace.

I also recall a riding change, which occurred in 1988, where a provincial riding was literally cut in half. The same principle applies at the national level, and this is one element that has to be taken into consideration. Another consideration is communities and, as much as possible, we want to keep communities together. I have seen all sorts of boundary changes in the past that often divided communities. I remember one occasion where we saw Weston and Brooklands, just south of Winnipeg North, and many identify those two communities as one. However, at the civic level, they were cut in half along one street. It was presumed to be a natural divide, a "concrete" divide, if I can put it that way, because it is a major artery. In fact, there is a very strong connection between both sides.

This is why I would ultimately argue that, when we take a look at the demographics, the population growth, both today and over the next few years, it is absolutely critical that these commissions are afforded the opportunity to be able to have proper consultations with members of the public. I honestly believe that.

As opposed to attempting to filibuster the bill again at committee stage by saying, "Well, let us expand the scope of the discussion at the committee stage", when it has already been determined here in the House once before, why not allow the bill, in its simplicity, to pass? This would allow the commission for the Province of Quebec to get down to the job at hand and actually meet with the people of Quebec to get their direct input. If it wants input from the Bloc party, heck, I could probably give that input in where the Bloc party lies on the issue.

It is time for the politicians to allow Bill C-14 out of committee so that it can come back to the House because we do not have that much time. We are already in June, and I think we will be out of here June 23. That does not leave that much time. Members can do the math: How many hours are left to sit in the House?

I do not think that we should be playing games on this issue. Hopefully, at the end of the day, I will inspire members from the Bloc and possibly Conservatives not to filibuster the bill in any way when it comes before a standing committee, so the committee can pass the legislation, get it back in here and get it through third reading so it can go to the Senate and be given royal assent. All of that needs to happen relatively quickly.

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For those who might think that this could be, in some twisted way, a filibuster, the legislation is already before the committee. The committee could pass the legislation. It does not need this motion. This motion is not meant to help facilitate the passage of Bill C-14, and the Conservatives, even though they will likely support this motion passing, know that.

• (1155)

At the end of the day, there is a different agenda being played out on the floor of the House of Commons. It has more to do with the gamesmanship of the Bloc and the Conservatives trying to change legislation or the scope of legislation after filibustering that legislation here. It is like they did not have enough filibustering on the floor of the House of Commons and want to do more at committee, in terms of changing the scope, so they bring in an amendment that really has no relevance or the chair would rule it as being beyond the scope of the legislation. If this motion does not pass, that would likely be the ruling of the chair. That is the reason why the members of the Bloc have brought it. I think they are starting to adopt some of the same principles of obstruction as the Conservatives.

My suggestion to the Bloc members is that if they truly care about what the people of Quebec have to say about this legislation, what they should be doing is encouraging the passage of it and joining the Liberal members from Quebec, who want to see this legislation pass and get royal assent, so that the people who live in Quebec, the people who actually contribute to where those lines are going to be drawn, are given the same sort of opportunity to participate as the rest of the people in Canada.

Other commissions are moving forward. Why would the Bloc not allow the people of Quebec that same opportunity? I suspect it is because there might be an alternative agenda. We saw that in the questions and answers of the member who moved the motion, to try to force a vote on this. They are eager to get it passed. They want to get it to committee so that they can cause more issues, which will ultimately cause additional delays. That is part of the motivation of the Bloc. I understand that, but the time will not allow me to expand on that particular point.

I can say that we, in the government caucus, believe that the people of Quebec, the public, need to be able to contribute to the commission on where those boundaries could be, or provide their recommendations in terms of the report that will be provided to the people of Quebec from the commission that has been designated in the province of Quebec.

Let us get it done. Let us pass the legislation out of committee and bring it back for third reading.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, according to the hon. member for Winnipeg North, defending the Quebec nation means playing politics and obstructing Parliament.

I will be frank: Earlier, I referred to history, by saying that in 1963, Quebec was sidelined by the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission. In 1982, when the Constitution was repatriated, Quebec was sidelined. In the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, Quebec was sidelined.

I was referring to what I called predatory federalism. I did not want to launch a constitutional debate. The only people who launch constitutional debates these days are the hon. member for Mont-Royal, who said that the notwithstanding clause should be removed from the Constitution, and the Prime Minister, who is prepared to defy a legitimate Quebec law, Bill 21 on secularism, and to try to stop Quebec from legislating on the French language. These are the only people who are prepared to talk about the Constitution.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, what I know is that the Prime Minister is a great defender of the French language. I know that first-hand, not only in the province of Quebec but in all regions of our country. We understand. We can have that debate. I would encourage the members, if it is the French-language debate that the member wants to see, to bring it forward in a motion.

I would suggest to my colleague across the way that having that debate could be a positive experience for all of us here in the House of Commons. For the people of Quebec or the people of Saint-Boniface and Saint-Pierre-Jolys in my home province, there is a very strong French connection. There is a high sense of pride in the language from coast to coast to coast. If that is what the member would like to debate, I am happy to debate it.

To me, what we are really debating is a political manoeuvre to try to get legislation held up at committee stage, when we should not be doing that. We need that legislation to pass through committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, apart from expressing his love for the French language, why does my colleague oppose the recommendation that a parliamentary committee review Quebec's political weight and, by extension, its citizen representation and the foundations of democracy?

As elected members of Parliament, are there other more important subjects for us than the quality of our democratic life and respect for Quebec communities and the Quebec nation? Why is he opposed to this? I find it pretty benign.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we understand that the legislation is unanimously supported in the House, that everyone wants 78 seats to be maintained. Bill C-14 would guarantee that. It would guarantee the province 78 seats. We should be able to pass that legislation. It should have been done by now, as far as I am concerned, and if the political will was there on all sides of the House to make that happen, it could be done. In fact, we have the power to do it today if we wanted to. I can say that the government's desire would be to see the legislation pass.

In terms of the debate that the member is suggesting, nothing prevents a standing committee to conduct a study of that. They could establish that at any point in time. All they have to do is raise the issue at the most appropriate standing committee. They could raise it at two or three different standing committees, but that is not the essence of what we should be debating today. What we are doing today is ultimately feeding the Conservative agenda, which the Bloc is indirectly supporting by bringing forward yet another motion in a standing committee that will enable them to continue to filibuster, and I do not think that is a good thing for the people of Quebec or Canada.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in listening to this debate, I think about representation across the country. We are talking about 78 seats in Quebec, but if we think about the rural parts of the country in smaller provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador, which is geographically large, but in terms of population, of course, it is small, we have seven seats in the House of Commons. We come here to do our lobbying for the province, vote on different legislation, and so on. We would love to have more seats. In fact, we are dwarfed by provinces like Quebec and Ontario, larger provinces with huge populations, which I understand, but in terms of representation, I think Bill C-14 strikes a good balance. We would also like to encourage more seats in Newfoundland and Labrador. We would love to have another seven, but the reality is that if we were to allow the system to continue as it currently exists, we would fall even further behind in terms of striking a balance in representation.

I would ask my colleague if he sees Bill C-14 as striking a good balance in terms of representation across the country.

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member mentioned that there are only seven seats in Newfoundland and Labrador. One would never know it, given the power of the Atlantic caucus. It is exceptionally effective, I must say, and Newfoundland and Labrador is represented exceptionally well in the House and in the committees in terms of the amount of workload that the members carry and their impact on government policy.

However, the member raises a very valid point. People as a whole in Canada understand our federation and why it is important that Prince Edward Island has four seats, and why it is important that we guarantee that the province of Quebec never goes below 78 seats, which is what Bill C-14 would do.

My colleague planted a seed asking about the future, about the province of Newfoundland or other provinces and the representation that they have. There are other opportunities, no doubt, both in opposition and in government, for us to enter into that dialogue. Canadians as a whole understand what is happening, they support it and it is time that we move on.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is just amazing. I think there is a picture of my colleague from Winnipeg North beside the definition of “bad faith” in the dictionary. In fact, I am eager to check the latest edition to make sure.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North speaks of the maritime provinces, and I think that is good. I think it is a magnificent region

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of Canada. It is wonderful to visit. However, I am trying to remember when in history Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland, for example, were recognized as nations. I would like to remind my colleague that the goal, the idea and the intention of what the Bloc Québécois is proposing is that we walk the talk. It has been recognized that Quebec is a nation. It has been recognized that Quebec has its own identity, an identity it must protect, and that it should be given the tools to protect its unique identity and its values. That is precisely what we are talking about today.

Can my colleague tell me in a few words whether, yes or no, he understands the importance Quebecers place on this principle of defence—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I have to give the member time to answer, and we are running out of time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has roughly 30 seconds to answer.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would like to believe that I have a decent understanding of the uniqueness of the province of Quebec and its distinct nature, its culture and its heritage. I would love the opportunity to spend more time in Quebec as a province.

I can assure the member that when I look in particular at the Prime Minister, I see someone who has a love and passion for the province of Quebec and the French language. As a party, we encourage and we want to see the growth of the French language throughout our country. We recognize the unique nature of the province of Quebec when it comes to French in North America, and we have to preserve that.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to this motion, which I find interesting. We welcome it because it raises an important issue.

The Bloc is calling on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study the issue of the political weight of Quebec. We are very open to this possibility because it is a matter of democracy and equality, recognizing the Quebec nation, protecting Quebec in the House and the weight we can have as representatives of our constituents.

I think it is a truly important topic and studying it would not get in the way of parliamentary business on other files and other issues.

I am also very proud of the work done by the NDP as a first step towards protecting Quebec's political weight and place in the House. We made sure that the agreement we negotiated with the minority government guaranteed the protection of the 78 seats allocated to Quebec, which risked losing one, as members will recall. That guarantee is set out in Bill C-14.

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I am very proud of this NDP achievement. We can clearly tell Quebecers that we kept our promise to represent them with this first step in the right direction. They are now protected whereas before they stood to lose some ground. We were there. We kept our promise to defend Quebecers.

This is an important issue because, when we talk about the political weight of Quebec or a province, we are talking about something that affects all citizens, almost the entire population, not just small groups or one sector.

I find it interesting that we are discussing this today at a time when Ontarians are on their way to the polls, and have been all day, to elect their MPP. I encourage everyone to vote, and it will come as no surprise that I am encouraging Ontarians to support the provincial NDP. I hope that their leader, Andrea Horwath, has a good day, and I hope that she will end the day with a strong caucus. We will be watching the day unfold with great interest.

Speaking of the provinces' political weight, I want to talk about some of the more technical details of our Canadian federation's rather unique system.

There is also the whole issue of immigrants. There are political, administrative and legislative tools that can help, but the basic tool is demographic weight. I think that we are encouraging open and inclusive immigration that enables Quebec to welcome more immigrants and to have the means and resources to help them integrate properly and learn French if necessary.

This is all part of the effort to maintain fair representation for Quebec, which is about 23% right now. This also makes it possible to guarantee the 78th seat.

The NDP is strongly in favour of encouraging a path to citizenship, rather than throwing up roadblocks in the case of temporary workers and permanent residents who come to work in Quebec and Canada. I think we need to set up mechanisms to properly welcome new citizens and to expedite the process, because wait times are extremely long right now. I want to stress that we know that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is currently having a lot of problems. I think that is part of the reflection and debate that we need to have on citizenship in general.

Basically, democracy is a revolutionary principle under which decisions are made by the people, not by a king who rules by so-called divine right and whose family has reigned for centuries by dividing power among aristocrats. A major revolutionary movement occurred in France, obviously, but also in England and the United States, driven by the belief that all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law and that it is up to them to choose their leaders and how they will be represented.

● (1210)

Of course, things started out far from perfect. The first democratic system was based on selective suffrage, where only the wealthiest people had the right to vote. People who were too poor to own property or pay taxes could not vote. It was a two-tier system that claimed to promote equality, but that was not an established right.

In our current system, roughly the same number of people are represented in each riding, in order to ensure fairness and equality

in the right to vote as expressed in the House or in a Parliament, so that people are not unduly overrepresented or under-represented. There is a genuine concern for fairness and equality. It is one of the basic criteria recognized by Elections Canada for the redistribution of electoral boundaries, which is conducted by the provincial commissions. Is it the only factor? No, it is not.

We live in a system of exceptions, because other criteria apply to representation in the House of Commons. Currently, there are three criteria.

The senatorial clause ensures that no province has fewer MPs than it has senators. This creates significant distortions in representation relative to demographic weight and population size, but it is recognized and accepted. For instance, it clearly and blatantly benefits Prince Edward Island, and that is fine. It was negotiated and agreed to. That is how the system works.

There is the "territorial clause", or the representation rule, for Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. It would be difficult to strictly apply the rule to the number of people who live in these ridings, because this would mean that huge territories with their own identities and sense of community could not be represented, or would be drowned out in a riding so large and immense that it would be meaningless. This representation rule is important; it is respected, and it must continue to be respected.

I am thinking in particular of my colleague from Nunavut, who represents communities with a common identity, culture, language and interests. Every day, she fights here in the House to promote and defend the interests of such important communities that have very specific needs in specific contexts.

There is the grandfather clause, which had not applied to Quebec until now. However, the NDP managed to negotiate a guarantee that no province would lose seats in the event of electoral redistribution, immigration, or differences in provincial demographic weights.

Taken together, the senatorial clause, the representation rule and the grandfather clause for four provinces, if memory serves, demonstrate that there are already exceptions in the system and that demographic weight is not the only criterion, but it is controlled, improved or amended in accordance with certain provisions.

This brings us to today's motion, which asks us to consider the possibility of a Quebec clause. As parliamentarians, we recognized that Quebec is a nation, so we must consider the political, democratic and administrative implications of this recognition.

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Ottawa and Quebec have already negotiated a number of asymmetrical agreements in the past, and that is to be expected. The NDP recognized the Quebec nation when it adopted the Sherbrooke declaration and other resolutions at its conventions. There is also the notion of asymmetrical federalism, which would allow Quebec to negotiate special powers or agreements with respect to particular issues.

As progressive New Democrats, we support the recognition of the Quebec nation and the idea of asymmetrical federalism. I think that we need to discuss what this means in practical terms in order to think about the potential consequences. If certain clauses were negotiated and drafted for certain provinces and territories in the past, I think we need to be brave and coherent and move forward in this special context.

The idea of protecting Quebec's political weight in the House is neither new or revolutionary.

• (1215)

It was negotiated by Brian Mulroney's Conservative federal government and Robert Bourassa's Liberal Quebec government. The provision was included in the Charlottetown accord. It is nothing new. It was accepted in the past, so it has already been normalized. There were discussions on the subject, and on many others as well, since the Charlottetown accord addressed many other issues. The NDP supported the Charlottetown accord. We reflected on the issue and discussed it, and the NDP accepted it.

I also think that it is in line with the historical view of the two founding nations. Consider the Laurendeau-Dunton commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. Consider also the historic agreement that began by saying that we would be together but that there were two founding nations, one British and the other French. I think we need to bear this in mind in our work and in the representation we have in the House. We must preserve this vision in the Official Languages Act, which recognizes French and English as Canada's two official languages. That is the rule used in the House of Commons. It is not always followed by the Liberal administration or by some companies that are subject to the Official Languages Act, but that is a separate issue.

That being said, I feel uncomfortable saying that we need to respect the concept of two founding nations. Of course it is important but, at the same time, it is historically insulting to the first nations, who were here long before any French or British settlers. We need to keep this concept of two founding nations in mind, and as a Quebecker, I will always defend it, but we must remember that by the time these two founding nations arrived, other nations had been living here for thousands of years. They were shunted aside, forgotten, disrespected. Some were even subjected to cultural genocide, an attempt to annihilate them. Awful things were done, like the residential schools, and that is part of our history.

We must therefore discuss the role and weight of the first nations in our democracy and in the House. Personally, I am open to studying various scenarios, like the system used in New Zealand, where seats are reserved for indigenous New Zealanders. This is another way of looking at things and building a unifying political system and democracy that could correct the historical mistake of thinking that there were only two founding nations.

To strike this balance, which is not an easy thing to do, we need to have an open mind and approach this in a spirit of reconciliation with the first nations and indigenous peoples. This is an issue that I think is important and that the NDP caucus is promoting. We should also have a discussion about the role and the political weight of the first nations in the House.

I want to come back to the issue of equality because, while we are on the topic of democracy, the political system and representation, I will say that, unfortunately, the very idea that all votes are equal is currently not true. This is not because of the provisions of our electoral system that I have just mentioned. It is because our voting system is unfair.

We live with an archaic first-past-the-post system that allows for startling democratic discrepancies between what the people decide and how they are represented in this House.

Let us talk about it. If we want to have the best possible system, we need to be able to talk about proportional voting, which would respect the popular will and the choices of voters. We live in an absurd system where a government can sometimes be elected with less than 40% of the vote. This is a common occurrence. A political party can get 37% or 38% of the vote and 55% to 60% of the seats in the House, which means 100% of the power. That is absurd. A majority of the people voted against a political party, sometimes by 60% or 62%, but that political party is given the keys to absolute power for four years.

• (1220)

In 2015, the Liberals made a promise to change this. The 2015 election was supposed to be the last one under an unfair and archaic voting system.

I sat on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. We travelled the country for a year listening to members of the public, stakeholders from interest groups, local elected officials, university professors and experts. We conducted online surveys and listened to people. Overwhelmingly, everyone saw that the current system is broken, that it does not ensure equality among all Canadians and that the House does not represent the will of the people. Ninety per cent of the witnesses who spoke at committee told us that, and 90% of the briefs we received said the same thing. Then the Liberal government realized that this was going in the wrong direction and that this was not necessarily where they wanted to go, so they conducted an online survey. It was an incredibly biased survey, but 75% of respondents still said they wanted a proportional representation voting system.

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At the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, there was an agreement between the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Green Party. We agreed to hold a referendum and suggest that Canadians and Quebecers adopt a proportional voting system. The majority of committee members reached a consensus to move forward and propose real change. The Liberals shocked us by responding that there was no consensus. They took that work and threw it in the garbage. That was the end of it. Then they walked away. They did that because it was not the direction they wanted to take. It was absolutely false to say that there was no consensus. There was a strong consensus among the witnesses, the people we consulted and the political parties represented on the committee. The Liberals were the only outliers. However, because they were in power, they did what they wanted. They broke their promise, and we missed an historic opportunity.

I believe we need to put this issue back on the front burner. It is important for improving our democratic system. I was saying earlier that a political party can be elected to a position of absolute power with less than 40% of the votes. We have even seen worse. One political party received more votes, but it became the opposition party, while the party that came second in terms of the popular vote got to form government. It is not just a distortion, it is hypocrisy. It goes against the popular will. If we are true democrats who believe that we must represent the people's choice in the House, then we must have a real conversation about adopting a much more suitable voting system, the one used by the vast majority of the world's democracies.

Canada is one of few countries, along with the United Kingdom and the United States, that still has this system. Most other countries have proportional voting systems of one kind or another. We could spend a long time talking about all the different systems, but my point is that proportional representation is much more respectful of the people's will.

I am very happy to be participating in today's debate. I think that our voting system, recognition of the Quebec nation, the political weight of various jurisdictions, communities and nations in the House are major issues, crucial ones. As a democrat, I always enjoy talking about democracy, about the people's power and about how we can improve our system.

I am ready to answer questions, but I do want to say that I think the recommendation in the motion is a good one and that it makes perfect sense to ask a parliamentary committee to study Quebec's political weight. This is an issue we should be talking about in the House.

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague's intervention, and in the last point he made, he said it was appropriate for a committee to be studying this. The committee is already going to be studying this. What this motion is really about is telling the committee in more detail exactly how to study it and perhaps what the outcome should be in advance of letting it do the work.

More importantly, the member spent a lot of time talking about proportional representation. The NDP seems to come from this perspective that proportional representation is all or nothing. However, the reality of the situation is that my riding is unique. It is different from his riding. It is different from the ridings out west. It is different from many, if not all, ridings throughout the country. When constituents have an issue, they like coming to see me. They want a door they can go to and knock on so they can talk to local people about their issues, people who will represent them locally.

In the NDP's version of proportional representation, how do we ensure that people continue to have local representation? I know the member said there are a whole bunch of different models we could be studying and deliberating on, but could he comment more generally on this?

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that excellent question. Earlier I said that I was part of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which travelled across the country to hear what people had to say. This is an issue that came up many times. I know that in my colleague's riding, people like to know who their MP is, sometimes so that they can congratulate him, sometimes so that they can criticize him, sometimes so that they can hold him to account and sometimes so that they can ask for federal government services. That is entirely appropriate. We could have a big discussion about that, but there is a way to maintain that contact.

Let us look at Germany, which has a mixed member proportional system. Half of the members are elected in local ridings, like in our current system. The other half are elected by a proportional voting system. Proportional representation corrects the major distortions created by a purely local electoral model.

Why is it that Conservative voters have basically no representation in Toronto? Why do Liberal voters have no representation in the Prairies? I think we also need to keep that in mind. There are models that can help us maintain that connection with voters while correcting problems with the system.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his speech, the first part of which I thought was quite nationalist and even independentist. It was good. I thank him for supporting the Bloc's position on Quebec's representation in the House of Commons.

My question is this: If we were to base this "Quebec clause" for example on the Charlottetown accord, which gave Quebec 25% representation in the House, would my colleague agree that we could go that far, 25%, which would mean six more members for Quebec?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. However, I am not sure about how he interpreted the start of my speech. I think that he took the rubber band and stretched it a bit.

I believe that this is a legitimate and reasonable target. That is part of the discussion that we need to have. We need to see what the current situation is. Is what was negotiated in 1992 necessarily applicable today? Maybe so, or maybe not, although I do think that we need to at least have this discussion and see how we can move forward to protect Quebec's political weight in the House.

I am very proud of the work that the NDP did in their negotiations; they at least protected what Quebec has right now and saved the province from losing a seat. I think that the NDP won a great victory for Quebec in its negotiations with the Liberal government.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his speech and especially for having once again raised the issue of our current voting system. I, too, was a member of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

[English]

I was particularly amused to hear the hon. member recall the weird survey the government did, called “vox populi”. It turned out that even when it tried to torque the questions to get the answers it wanted, the survey was never clear, because no one ever had a chance to just mark down “I want proportional representation.” It was very twisted. We did find out that 70% of Canadians who did the survey said they would rather see a lot of smaller parties work together, even if it takes longer, to come to decisions in a co-operative fashion by consensus. Our system here is way too adversarial and way too partisan, and it is not necessary.

Can the hon. member imagine a time when we can get rid of the perverse voting system we have here? We have been promised it over and over again by the Liberals, but it was snatched away from us.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right.

If we look at the number of members that the parties get elected and the number of votes they get nationally, it creates distortions, as I was saying earlier. There was one election where it took an average of 35,000 votes to elect a Liberal member, 40,000 votes to elect a Conservative member, 80,000 votes to elect an NDP member and practically 300,000 votes to elect a Green Party member. It is completely unfair to the voters.

I think that we do indeed need to work together, collaborate on finding a better system that will be fairer for everyone and will likely produce governments that will have to work together. A proportional voting system is not just more respectful of the voters; it also changes the political culture.

I know that my colleague is keen on that notion and that idea. It creates parliaments that are less aggressive and confrontational with a lot more dialogue and consensus building. I think that is best for our democracy and it is also what people want from us.

• (1235)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am going to take the liberty of passing the puck to my colleague

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from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He can decide whether it lands on his stick or his skate; it depends how he takes it.

We are trying to make the Liberals understand that the Bloc Québécois does not want to pick a fight. We just want to maintain Quebec's political weight and representation in Parliament. That is the rationale for the 25% representation that Quebec is requesting, which is the same ratio that was entrenched in the Charlottetown accord, as my colleague mentioned.

When asked about this, the Liberals repeat that they have already given Quebec what it wanted, 78 seats. However, they set that number without considering representation, which is still at risk based on demographics and the gradual increase in the number of House seats.

I would like to hear my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie offer his opinion and expertise on the Liberals' attitude. They do not understand what we are trying to say when we demand that Quebec's political weight be maintained in Parliament.

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

I am not yet sure if his pass will hit my stick or my skates; it depends on how fast I can get to the puck.

My colleague asked an excellent question. I find it hard to understand the Liberals' stubbornness in refusing to discuss this. I am very proud that we were able to get the government to protect the 78 seats in Quebec. However, that is not the end of the discussion, or the end of the story.

I think we need to be open to this discussion, and I do not understand why the Liberal members from Quebec are not. They probably need to discuss it within their caucus. Why are they not showing more support for this motion so that we can discuss it in committee and determine next steps?

We protected 78 seats, and I think that this first step was absolutely necessary. However, this is not the end of this story or of this historic demand from Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time.

This really is quite incredible. There is one day in the entire life of Parliament set aside for debate about the state of our democracy, and in particular the rules of order that govern this place. Unfortunately, we see other parties that want to debate a different motion and therefore overwhelm the time set aside for this important debate on the health of Parliament and the health of our democracy.

In particular, the member for Winnipeg North, who seems to be the only person speaking most of the time in the government caucus, has already eaten 40 minutes of the day that would otherwise have been set aside for this conversation on the Standing Orders, the rules of Parliament, and the state of our democracy.

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It is very clear why the Liberals do not want to have a debate about the state of our democracy and the rules that govern it. The sad truth is that ours is a Parliament in decline. This is evident to many of us and is shown in the objective metrics of the health of our democracy. Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the use of time allocation and prorogation of Parliament provoked conniptions from Liberals and from the commentariat concerned that such measures were hurting democracy by curtailing debate and limiting the ability of other parties to hold the government accountable.

Today the Liberals, with the NPD's support, not only regularly use time allocation to limit debate but have normalized the routine use of programming motions that completely skip over whole stages of deliberation on bills, including blocking all committee study and preventing opportunities for amendment. These parties have gone from being apoplectic about any limiting of time at a particular stage of a bill, to passing motions to wholesale skip stages of consideration.

This Parliament has also spent substantial portions of the past few years suspended, and when it is sits, it is partially reduced to a Zoom call. Duly elected members of Parliament and their staff are barred from entering Parliament because of personal health choices, even while those same people mix unmasked and unvaccinated with staff and MPs at receptions only a block away.

Many of the same people who decried time allocation under Stephen Harper now defend the wholesale running over of the normal functioning of this institution on multiple fronts as allegedly necessary to prevent the so-called playing of partisan games and delay tactics, as if members of Parliament were obliged to do everything possible to pass government legislation quickly without serious review.

Today we have Motion No. 11, which is another attack on democracy. It allows the government to change the adjournment time at will without any notice and without a vote, which makes it extremely difficult, by design, for opposition politicians to do their jobs.

We are not just a Parliament in decline; we are a democracy in decline. To observe as much is not to say that we have ceased to be a democracy, but that our democracy is weakening and we need to act in response. The globally recognized authority on democracy measurement is called IDEA: the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. It is based in Stockholm.

IDEA recognizes that democracy is not an absolute: It is a measure of a country's performance across a series of metrics, such as representative government, impartial institutions and fundamental rights. According to IDEA, Canada's performance on key variables of checks on government and effective Parliament are in sharp decline. Our performance, in terms of checks on government, is at .68. That is lower than the United States and any nation in western Europe. Our score for effective Parliament has dropped precipitously from .73 in 2015 to .59 now. It is just barely above the world average.

It is not just Conservatives who say our Parliament is in decline. It is the world-leading experts responsible for measuring the health

of parliaments and parliamentary democracies who say that we are a Parliament in decline.

Unfortunately, I do not have time to do a complete analysis of democratic decline in Canada, but I want to talk about what we should be talking about today, which is how the proper functioning of the Standing Orders provides tools for us to resist democratic decline. As the rules of the House of Commons, the Standing Orders have a particular role to play in trying to help preserve the vitality of our institutions.

The purpose of Parliament is to bring Canadians together who are chosen by and speak for the experience of different localities, to deliberate about the common good of the whole nation and pass laws in accordance with it. Within that, the role of the Standing Orders is to prescribe the form of that deliberation, such as who gets to speak, for how long and in what ways on what subjects. This balances the need to hear from a multiplicity of perspectives with a need to proceed with legislation in a reasonable amount of time.

The Standing Orders and traditions of this place are finely tuned to achieve that necessary balance. Ultimately, in a democracy the majority should have its way. The rules of the House exist, to some extent, to slow down the majority and to give other points of view the opportunity to be heard and to create space for the minority to try to persuade the majority.

Democracy is the idea that the majority should rule, but not that the majority is always right. Majorities can get vital issues wrong. In particular, since the dawn of democracy, thinkers have worried about how the stimulation of short-term passions in the majority can make for a kind of mob rule mentality and lead to bad decision-making. Even unanimous decisions stirred up around short-term impulses and passions can be deeply regretted afterward when the tyranny of the moment has passed.

● (1240)

The framers of modern democracies perceived these risks. They have noted that the world's first democracy killed the world's first known philosopher. Modern democracy has sought to improve on ancient mob rule by liberating the people from both the tyranny of elites and the tyranny of short-term thinking, and has thus sought to stimulate decision-making based on the considered judgment of the people over time.

The majority should rule, but should still be expected to hear contrary points of view and to sleep on decisions before finalizing them. Such requirements still do not provide a guarantee of right decision-making, but they do improve the chances.

Individuals and collectives make better decisions when they think about those decisions first. It is a key function of Parliament in general, and of the Standing Orders in particular, to create the time and space required for authentic, deliberative democracy and for the considered judgment of the people over time.

Those who have developed and refined Parliament as both an expression of, but also a check on, majoritarianism understood well that proportionate deliberation increases the chance that the majority will get both the big and the small questions right without unintended consequences.

The Standing Orders that we have are not perfect, but they are generally tuned to help strike this vital balance between majority rule and deliberation. A problem that is substantially driving the decline of our Parliament today is not so much the Standing Orders themselves, actually, but the casualness with which the rules contained therein are frequently abridged.

In principle, if rules are established and structures are as they should be, there is no need to abridge them, yet it is a veritable constant that we hear some delegate of the government rise in the House to propose that the House take some action notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House. Every time we accept this, we are choosing to act contrary to that long-standing wisdom and, as such, we should be very careful.

Unanimous consents, even on mundane procedural matters, involve the House derogating from established practice. I am certainly not against the limited use of this abridgement in such cases, but I still think we should acknowledge its risks.

What is much worse is what we see more and more of in this Parliament, which is the way that the House now frequently goes beyond rule abridgement by unanimous consent for procedural simplicity. We are now operating under a series of special rules, passed by a majority of the House over the objections of the minority, that have fundamentally changed our operating practices to limit opposition input and government accountability.

We have government programming motions, which I have already discussed. We have the routine efforts of members of the House to get the House to pronounce itself on substantive issues through unanimous consent, without notice, where members are asked to unanimously endorse something, oppose something, or even adopt a piece of legislation at all stages with no advance notice or debate.

The use of these unanimous consent motions does respond to a real problem: It is that members of Parliament do not, I think, have enough opportunity to put substantive proposals forward. I would support changes to our Standing Orders that expand the available opportunities for members to put forward substantive motions or private members' bills for debate.

I still suspect that even with those opportunities, we would see MPs stand up out of the blue and expect the entire House to pronounce itself on substantive matters without formal notice or debate, and we would still see government motions that try to abridge long-established Standing Orders.

Those who obsessively use unanimous consent motions are, perhaps unwittingly, seeking to abridge vital checks and balances and bring us back to democratic mob rule, where the tyranny of the moment, instead of the considered judgment of the people over time, is what rules. I oppose these efforts to roll the clock back to a purely majoritarian democracy instead of a functioning, deliberative democracy.

The use of unanimous consent motions also lends itself to significant gamesmanship: efforts to move such motions when particular members are out of the House, or to actively engage certain members in conversation so that they will not notice that a motion is being moved. It is a given, with committee assignments and other re-

sponsibilities, that all members are not able to be in the House all day.

This is why we have, for instance, bells before votes. Unanimous consent motions override the rights of members who are not present. The Standing Orders and the Speaker should work to preserve and protect the rights of members and the health of our deliberative democracy by constraining these kinds of Standing Order—

• (1245)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The member for Drummond on a point of order.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I have two quick points that I feel are valid.

I could have been handsome or intelligent. Unfortunately, I am neither. I am trying to see the link between the passionate speech by my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and the Bloc Québécois's proposal to broaden the scope of Bill C-14 and study it at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. There may be a link, but I need some clarification.

Second, I do not mean to be critical of my colleague's passionate style, but I would very respectfully like to point out that he is speaking very quickly and that the interpreters are sometimes having a hard time following. It is very important for us to be able to properly hear his comments.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. member for his intervention and I agree that this is an important point. The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is speaking very quickly, which makes it difficult for the interpreters to do their job. This is not the first time this issue has been raised in the House, not only in relation to that member, but to many other members too.

If members could slow down a little, that would help the interpreters. Perhaps the interpreters have a copy of the member's speech. If not, I would encourage members to provide the interpreters with a copy of their speeches.

With respect to the content of the speech, I just want to remind members that it is very important that the debates in the House focus on the issue at hand. That being said, we must also recognize that some flexibility is allowed in speeches. I am sure the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan will ensure that his arguments relate directly to the motion before the House.

[English]

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has one minute and 16 seconds, and I would just ask him to slow down a bit during the rest of his speech.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the Bloc members point out we are into a debate on a different motion than what was scheduled for today, which was the one day when we were supposed to be talking about the rules of the House and the impact on our democracy. I will endeavour to make the link.

Routine Proceedings

The Standing Orders and the Speaker, I believe, should work to preserve and protect the rights of members and the health of our democracy by constraining these practices of Standing Order abridgment. Requests for unanimous consent motions should not be entertained outside of certain very narrow circumstances, and those circumstances should involve a required consultation with all elected members, not just three or four.

The Standing Orders should constrain the use of programming motions, such as through prohibiting the use of time allocation or closure on a programming motion. The deadly combination of a programming motion and closure is allowing the government to pass a bill at all stages in an afternoon.

By constraining their own abridgment, the Standing Orders could reduce these abuses that are weakening our Parliament and roll us back toward unconsidered mob rule. I have no desire to see our Parliament reduced to a body that ritualistically gives perfunctory approval to bills that ministers assure us are very good, while endorsing unconsidered motions simply because they sound nice at first hearing.

Our parliamentary democracy, providing the mechanisms for the people's representatives to genuinely debate about important ideas over a reasonable period of time, is worth defending and preserving, and that is the issue we need to be discussing today.

However, we have Liberal members, and one in particular, who want to talk for a great deal of time on a different Bloc motion: a motion that we are formally debating right now, but we could be debating at any time. They want to discuss it at great length to avoid this vital conversation about the health of our democracy, and that is shameful.

• (1250)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, I will remind the member that he needs to slow down a bit when he is speaking. I know he is very passionate, as was mentioned, but it is very difficult for the interpreters to follow. It is important that all the members within the House are able to understand the speech that is being delivered.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I guess it is in true form that Conservatives and the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan would somehow blame the government for the motion that we are debating today.

Nonetheless, during his speech, I heard him speak at length about the freedoms of democracy, and he mentioned that democracy is in decline in Canada. I would refer him to an organization called Freedom House. Freedom House has been around for 80 years now. It was developed toward the latter half of World War II.

It is an organization that enjoys bipartisan support in the United States and it rates freedoms throughout the world, specifically political and civil freedoms. Of the 210 countries that it rates, Canada comes in fifth. Canada gets a score of 40 out of 40 for political rights and 58 out of 60 for civil liberties.

How is it possible that the member is able to suggest that the freedoms in Canada and the democracy that relies on those freedoms is somehow in jeopardy, given that this organization—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do have to allow for other questions. I find with the questions, there is a lot of preamble. I would ask members to shorten their preamble, and get straight to the questions and comments as quickly as possible.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the hon. member did not listen or he did not want to listen. IDEA, the organization I referred to that ranks global democracies across a series of metrics, draws on various metrics, and Freedom House is part of the input data that IDEA uses.

IDEA ranks democratic performance across a range of metrics including civil liberties, checks on government, pluralism and other metrics. What I said is specifically on the metric of checks on government. I did not talk about civil liberties. There are issues there but I did not talk about them. On the issue of checks on government, our objective ranking is declining.

The member's question completely ignored my comment on how checks on government and metrics on effective Parliament are in decline. On checks on government and effective Parliament, we have dropped massively in international ranking since 2015. That is a different metric from civil liberties. It is an extremely important metric and the member should be aware of the difference.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, but I would very much like him to bring the discussion back to Bill C-14 and Quebec representation.

Where exactly does my colleague stand when it comes to the Charlottetown accord, which guaranteed Quebec 25% of the seats in the House of Commons?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, with respect to these issues of representation, the Conservatives supported the bill saying that no province's number of seats should drop, and I think I have been clear about that. I also think the principle of representation by population is an important principle in our democracy. We need to recognize that Quebec's identity is important, Alberta's identity is important and British Columbia's identity is important, and that every person in this country needs their voice to be heard in the House. That is my view.

However, if Parliament is not functioning properly and is not the mechanism through which individual MPs can actually be heard, check the power of government and debate legislation, the Standing Orders are not working properly. If Parliament is not working properly, then it barely matters who is here, because Parliament is prevented from doing its job. Even prior to the issues the member is raising is the question of whether Parliament is able to be that deliberative assembly of one nation. That is what I think is really important.

Routine Proceedings

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member makes reference to unanimous consent motions, and for the most part I agree with what he is saying. However, does he believe that the Speaker has some authority to use discretion, as we have been witnessing over the last little while, to clamp down on UC motions? There should be an expectation of discussions and approvals prior to a member's standing up and introducing one. What are the member's thoughts on that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I have no choice but to find myself in violent agreement with the member that there should be proper consultations. I would just emphasize that those consultations should be with members of the House, not just with House leaders of recognized parties.

When there is a unanimous consent motion, the idea is that the House as a whole is expressing itself. There needs to be a mechanism for all members of the House to be properly and officially informed prior, just as we have with bells and the normal notice procedure. That is extremely important for protecting the rights not just of parties, but of all members.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an honour to stand in this place and talk about the issues that are pressing to our nation. Certainly, I find it interesting that today a mechanism is being used for a motion the Bloc has brought forward to share some of the priorities of Bloc members. They have highlighted and shared what has come from their constituents.

Over the course of the next nine and a half minutes or so, I hope to discuss some of the substance of the motion and the overall realities that this place faces, in what I hope will be a productive conversation surrounding the importance of the institution that is Parliament and some of the rules and procedures that are associated with it. As will be no surprise to members who have had a chance to listen to some of my interventions in the past, I have a great deal of concern, because we are seeing what I would suggest is a decline in democracy in our nation.

I will highlight as well, when it comes to the motion, that there are questions and concerns surrounding representation for certain provinces with distinct cultures. Coming from Alberta, I know what it is like to be under-represented in this place in terms of the number of seats. It is, I believe, meant to be representation by population in Canada's lower house of our bicameral legislature. We also have a severe under-representation in our upper house. In our conversation around ensuring that our democratic infrastructure is responsive to the realities of our future, that needs to be part of the conversation.

Over the course of COVID, a massive effect has taken place that has impacted Parliament. Especially in the 43rd Parliament, I never thought I would have to fight so hard as a newly elected member of Parliament to simply do my job. There are many aspects of doing that job that have a clear relationship with the Standing Orders and rules we have, which govern the conduct of this place.

Over the course of the last number of months since the election and over the last two Parliaments, there has been a very different

look and feel to Parliament. Although this is necessitated by COVID, I note that Canada lagged far behind in terms of Parliament's ability to be reactive and responsive in ensuring that democracy was an essential service in the midst of what is a global pandemic. I hope we can learn the lessons, some of which have been learned, that ensure we can get the functioning of this place back to what I would call a standard of normalcy and ensure there is clear representation. I will touch on Motion No. 11 in a moment, but I will note that over the course of the pandemic, we have seen that accountability can hide behind a computer screen. I know the House leader of the official opposition has brought forward what is an eminently reasonable series of proposals to get the functioning of this place back to normal.

I would like to highlight Motion No. 11. There are some very concerning aspects to it. As I said when discussing Motion No. 11, I can only imagine that had a Conservative prime minister, such as former prime minister Stephen Harper, even contemplated bringing forward something like Motion No. 11, there would have been an outcry by politicians and politicians from different political parties. The government eliminated quorum calls and preprogrammed the ability of a minister of the Crown to extend sittings, without consultation other than with a coalition partner, adding stress on resources. I have done a great deal of research into the matter, and I suggest that the consequences of Motion No. 11 may bring into question the constitutionality of the debate that is taking place.

• (1300)

As I referenced in a point of order earlier this year, the second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* says, "the courts might be effective in ensuring the observance of procedural requirements imposed by the constitution with respect to the enactment of legislation." Quorum in this place is a constitutional requirement. I would certainly like to hear from members of the government and their partners in the NDP whether they have acknowledged that there may be some constitutional implications to the debates that take place.

Furthermore, I call into question the confidence and supply motion. Through Motion No. 11 and other methods, the government has shown that it does not really want an opposition in this place; it simply wants an audience, whether that means the Conservatives, the Bloc or even the Greens. Although the Greens do not have official standing in this Parliament as a party, they have made their stand. However, the government's confidence and supply agreement, which clearly Canadians did not vote for, and the collaboration that can take place actually circumvent the role that Parliament is supposed to play.

Routine Proceedings

I would also like to talk about the vaccine mandate that exists, which I suggest violates the privileges of members of the House. There is a larger conversation about the thousands of Canadians who have been fired due to the Liberal Prime Minister. What we just learned regarding 1,600 armed forces members, at a time when there is a huge shortage of personnel in our military, is that the government fired those individuals. That is unacceptable. Leadership needs to come from the top to adjust. Let us understand that imposing these sorts of things have consequences for our country. We need to ensure that the rules and procedures we follow respect the fact that we will have disagreements. We cannot weaponize things, as we have seen the Prime Minister do. We cannot weaponize something like a vaccine mandate to silence political opponents.

I will now touch on, as the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan did before me, unanimous consent motions. We have seen a troubling divide grow between the executive government and administration and Parliament. Unanimous consent motions are one of the ways in which we see that.

We have seen unanimous consent motions pass in this place that have not been followed and have allocated or said to allocate significant funds from the treasury without consequence. I suggest that when it comes to anything other than administrative procedures or dilatory motions, the current process works fine. However, when it comes to policy or political matters, there has to be an adjustment. There has to be a change to ensure that the spirit and use of these motions do not inhibit the ability of this place to function effectively and properly.

I suggest that when it comes to a path forward for UC motions, if they are not, as I mentioned, administrative, procedural or dilatory, consent needs to be provided for a member to even present a unanimous consent motion. That would be a practical solution. Consent should have to be obtained. However, as an idea for those who will contemplate these important decisions, I suggest that if the House leaders of every registered political party were to agree, it would be perfectly reasonable for a unanimous consent motion to go forward, showing that there had been fulsome consultations. If not, they would need consent to simply proceed from there.

In my last minute, I would like to touch on a couple of additional things. I will share that one has to ensure that the role of this place holds a parallel line with the administration managed by the executive of government. The only reason that government exists is Parliament. That is how it works in a parliamentary democracy.

I hope there has been a connection between the debate at hand and the Standing Orders debate to come, and I hope I have been able to effectively bring some items of relevance that will help in the debate in this place.

• (1305)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I indicated to the previous speaker, on the idea of unanimous consent motions, I concur with many of the member's thoughts.

Does the member concur, failing an agreement among the House leaders, that the Speaker does have the authority and control, based

on what they observe, if a motion does not seem to have unanimous consent and there were no consultations, to rule it out three words into it?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I would agree. That is why I would suggest that, other than administrative, procedural or dilatory items, consent needs to be acquired before even entering into a unanimous consent motion, and unless all four House leaders, in the case of this Parliament, were in agreement that a unanimous consent motion could go forward. Although, there are some unanimous consent motions, which I have seen before, that I would wholeheartedly agree with, but that the government did not appear to have followed through on, and so the question of confidence, I believe, can be brought into question.

Certainly, we have to take seriously the decisions that this place makes in terms of their implication on the public purse, in terms of their implication on policy, and ensure that we find the right process and procedure to respect the spirit of what UC motions are, and need to be, but also the debate that needs to take place on important items that we have put before us.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague gave a thoughtful speech.

About 14 years ago, I had occasion to sit with some parliamentarians who had served before me for several decades. Among the wisdom they imparted to me was that there are very few privileges of an individual member of Parliament, and they need to be judiciously protected. One of them is the right to vote the way they want to on private member's legislation and introducing private member's legislation, and the second is to always maintain their individual right to say yes or no on a unanimous consent motion because, of course, by definition, any motion in the House that is unanimous requires the consent of each member.

I must say that I have been troubled recently by the springing of UC motions on members of the House who do not know what the motion is about and who have not had a chance to study or deliberate on it, yet they are asked to make a pronouncement, sometimes on very serious matters, including genocide.

Does my hon. colleague agree that we need to find a mechanism to make sure that UC motions are only used for matters that have obvious and broad support or that are timely, and that every member in the House deserves to have the right to deliberate before passing judgment on any matter before the House, as our voters expect us to do?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I would have just been voting for the first time 14 years ago.

I would agree with the member that we do have to ensure that we get it right, and I did make some suggestions in my speech as to how, practically, we could do that. Certainly, although they are not well understood today, the reasons for the privilege within this place go back nearly a millennia, and those reasons, although from a very different context than we live in today, are equally important today. The highest elected office in this land is that of the member of Parliament, and to ensure that MPs have the authority and the ability to do their jobs, as their constituents require them, is absolutely fundamental.

As well, I would suggest defending other areas of privilege, such as a member's entrance into this place and ensuring that there are free votes and protection. Certainly, the Conservatives supported the use of the Reform Act to ensure that, for example, a prime minister or the leader of a political party could not unilaterally kick somebody out of their caucus, which is, I would suggest, part of the preservation of the privilege of members of Parliament to ensure that democracy and Parliament is responsive to what its intent is in this place.

• (1310)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I participate in the debate today having really hoped that this would have been about the subject that was supposed to be debated. Once in a parliamentary cycle we have a unique opportunity to talk about the parliamentary procedure of the House and ways we could look at improving upon it. At least within the Liberal caucus, we have had a number of opportunities to talk about that, bringing forward ideas and discussing them among ourselves. It certainly would have been a great opportunity to have done that in the House with everyone else.

I realize that some members have been inadvertently sneaking some of that into their speeches, as the last two Conservatives did, and I get that, but it would have been better to have had the opportunity to really do this. Instead, what we have before us is a motion of instruction that has been put forward by the Bloc Québécois. Most MPs probably had not even heard of a motion of instruction until two days ago when the Conservatives did it randomly, out of nowhere, and now we have the Bloc Québécois doing it. I cannot help but wonder if perhaps it saw what the Conservatives did two days ago and thought it was another good way to interfere with the business of the House. Perhaps it does not see the importance of needing to discuss the procedural items of the House.

Nonetheless, I will start off by commenting on a couple of things that I just recently heard. The member for Battle River—Crowfoot said a couple of things that really resonated with me. One of those things was when he spoke about quorum calls. I know he has risen in the House on a couple of occasions to object to the use of a motion passed by the House to eliminate quorum calls at certain parts of the day through Motion No. 11. He seemed to suggest that there is a constitutional issue there that could rule that legislation unacceptable, inadmissible or out of order, whatever the term might be.

However, the reality of the situation is that we routinely pass motions, usually unanimous consent motions, that prevent members from making quorum calls whenever we go into the evening. Whether we do that through a unanimous consent motion or an ac-

tual motion with a recorded vote, I do not think there is any difference at all. Whether everybody agrees to it or a majority agrees to it, the precedent has been set, and the precedent is well entrenched within the House that we have the opportunity to put forward a procedural rule to prevent those quorum calls from being made. I am pretty sure the Conservatives realize that too, even though the member brought it up a couple of times.

The member for Battle River—Crowfoot also said something that I found very interesting about democracy being ineffective and was not able to fully function during the pandemic. I think he said people were hiding behind computer screens. I guess that is just in line with what we have heard from Conservatives over the last two years. They have never really taken the pandemic seriously. They have always been about three steps behind everybody else when it comes to what we should be doing. They were always the last ones to put on masks. They were the last ones to adopt the need for vaccines. They were the last ones to get vaccines. They were the last ones in every regard as it related to the pandemic, so I am not surprised about that, but I will say that democracy worked very well during the pandemic if anyone asks me, particularly in the beginning of the pandemic when members of the House of Commons came together and unanimously passed a number of measures to take care of Canadians.

We have procedures that set out how we have to do things in the House, and coming into the House of Commons in the numbers that we did, based on the arrangements that we made with the various House leaders to ensure safety or make that as safe as possible, is something that we did. We were able to put money in the bank accounts of Canadians within five weeks of the World Health Organization declaring a global pandemic. If nothing else can say that democracy worked during the pandemic, I suggest that would be it.

• (1315)

I realize the Conservatives will, for a very long time into the future, make the suggestion that democracy is failing because we are looking at new ways of doing things and are not stuck in the stone age. They can argue that to their hearts' content, but I think the vast majority of people would see otherwise.

Here we are with this motion of instruction from the Bloc Québécois. What I find very interesting about it is that it already had an opposition day motion on this exact issue. It clearly was not happy with the outcome because it was not in its favour, so rather than accept defeat and move on, it has decided it will jam up a day of House time and put forward this motion of instruction, which will basically rehash everything we have already attempted to do.

My understanding, and I could be wrong, from having listened to some of what I have heard come from the Conservatives today, is it appears as though they might be willing to support this to go to committee, but after that they may or may not support it. It is almost as though the Conservatives and the Bloc have got together and decided they will collectively attempt to disrupt the proceedings of the House. That is what I am seeing here today.

Routine Proceedings

When we look back to just a few months ago when the member for Durham was still the Conservative leader, it was a completely different Bloc Québécois, but as soon as he left something happened. Things changed in the House of Commons. The Bloc Québécois suddenly started to become a lot more cozy with the Conservatives. It was right at that time when the member for Durham was kicked out, and it was becoming obvious that the member for Carleton was going to become the new leader. Suddenly, the posture within the House of Commons changed and the Bloc Québécois was trying to align itself with, or at least not be as aggressively against, the Conservatives, and I cannot help but wonder why. I have hypothesized on it before in the House, and I will save it from my doing that again, but I find it interesting that here we are seeing the exact same kind of thing happen with the Bloc Québécois now.

It has put forward a motion that basically states that Quebec will always have 25% of the elected seats throughout Canada. While this work is at committee, it is basically telling the committee how to do its job. The Bloc already tried to do this through an opposition day motion, but were unsuccessful, yet here we are, and it is trying to ram it through again. I think it is extremely unfortunate that it cannot accept the fact that it has lost the battle and is looking for an opportunity to rehash it.

I also find it extremely regrettable for the reasons I stated at the beginning. Today was supposed to be a very special day to discuss the procedures of the House. Unfortunately, it now looks as though that will not happen, and we will not be able to. I can tell from what the Conservative colleagues who spoke before me said that they had things they wanted to talk very passionately about with respect to this, but they were not able to do so, or at least not in the context in which they should have had the opportunity to do that.

As it relates to what the Bloc Québécois is looking for specifically, it talks about arbitrarily ensuring that, regardless of what happens, Quebec gets 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. The reality is that we have a process in place that determines the number of seats to be distributed based on population and geography. That process exists and that is the process that is followed every 10 years when it comes to redistribution. I think it is clear the House has determined that Quebec should not ever lose any seats and, as a result, work can be done to ensure that does not happen, but what is missing from all of this is the fact that Quebecers have not had an opportunity to speak to this yet, which is part of the process.

• (1320)

Quebeckers should have the right to speak to this, and they should have that opportunity now, when this is going to committee, but instead we see the Bloc members trying to come forward and circumvent the work that would have been done by the committee to get that public consultation and that feedback during committee, and trying to arbitrarily impose their own wishes. Quite frankly, that is not how our democratic process works.

This bill is extremely important, but the most important thing right now as it relates to the bill is that the people get to speak. What is important here is people and public input, not politicians. Unfortunately, what we have seen the Bloc Québécois do is make this all about the politicians. The politicians in the Bloc Québécois

seemingly know better and are not interested in hearing what the people of Quebec actually want to say and allowing them to have their input into this.

As this process continues, as the redistribution process is upon us now, what always happens at this point is that every 10 years we go out and try to engage in these conversations. We have the elections office do its work in the beginning. We can give some preliminary directions, such as that Quebec does not lose any seats, but otherwise from that point forward it is important that we allow that process to occur. It appears as though we have just completely abandoned that and there is no longer an interest in allowing that to happen.

When I think about how we should be moving forward on this, the best thing to do now is to allow the committee to do its work and solicit public input, to let people have the opportunity to have their say and inform the decisions, and to allow the Bloc member on that committee to ask similar questions. Then, based on the feedback that Bloc members receive at committee, they can put forward all the recommendations to their heart's content. What they should not be doing is trying to interject at this stage and insist on something that, quite frankly, the House has already dealt with.

As I indicated earlier, we had an opposition day motion that was basically on this exact same subject matter. The Bloc members had the entire day to speak about it. They put up speaker after speaker. Nobody from the government and nobody from the opposition moved motions during the routine proceedings. We allowed the debate to happen, and at the end of the day we voted on it. Although the outcome of that vote was not what the Bloc particularly wanted it to be, the outcome was the outcome. It was over and that was it. The Bloc members should accept the democratic process. They should accept the fact that they lost that vote and, most importantly, that the rest of the House allowed the democratic process to happen that day.

However, what we are seeing today is the exact opposite. It is not really even a government bill today. The House has a regular opportunity, once in a parliamentary session, to discuss the procedural elements of the House and the procedure of the House, and the Bloc should have done the right thing and allowed democracy to occur and members to have their say on how the House functions, just as the government and the other opposition parties did on their opposition day, but the Bloc members did not do that. Instead, they said they are going to ruin the day for everybody else and insist on having a debate about something they already debated and they already lost.

• (1325)

I have said many times in the House that I get frustrated with the obstructionist nature of the way things seem to be unfolding in the House lately. I see it quite often. I usually see it from the Conservatives, and now we are seeing it from the Bloc, which is doing the exact same thing. I think it is extremely unnecessary.

The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, in his speech, talked about the need to be able to slow down. I agree with him. The most important tool that any opposition has, especially Her Majesty's loyal opposition, is the ability to slow things down. The opposition can force marathon votes, and we have seen it force voting for up to 30 hours, non-stop. It can filibuster on various issues, which we have seen the Conservatives do in the past. Those are tools to slow things down.

However, I would suggest to my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan that the Conservatives should pick their battles. They should determine what issues they are willing to die on, for lack of a better expression, and then they should use those opportunities to slow Parliament down because it means something to them. They should not do it at every single opportunity, but that is exactly what they do.

Bill C-18 is a bill that has in it an election commitment from the Conservatives, and they are slowing that down. That was not the intent of giving those rules to the opposition to slow things down. It is not what it was meant for. It was not meant for the opposition to be able, without regard for anything whatsoever, to just try to put the brakes on, full stop, without any regard for anything, but that is what the Conservatives are doing.

I agree with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan that having the ability to slow things down is important, but I would suggest to him that the Conservatives should pick their battles and decide what issues are the most important to them. At least then, when they do try to put the brakes on, people would pay attention and say that if they are putting the brakes on, it must be important. Instead, the public are just rolling their eyes and saying that the Conservatives are doing it again, just for any old reason, just refusing to let anything pass through the House.

In any event, those are my thoughts on the matter. I have been speaking for almost 20 minutes now, and I have been given the two-minute warning. I will say that it is a much more enjoyable experience doing this virtually. I cannot hear a single heckle, and I have not given a speech in the House without a heckle in a long time. It could have very well been happening, but I just had no idea. Maybe I should try this more often, because at least it allows me to collect my thoughts a lot more easily.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, maybe the reason nobody said anything during the member for Kingston and the Islands' speech is that we were all speechless as we watched him dig himself deeper and deeper into a hole.

The member spoke at length and in great detail about the Bloc Québécois opposition motion we voted on on March 2. He said the Bloc Québécois is frustrated by the outcome of its opposition day vote and is responding to defeat by trying again.

That motion said that 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.

Routine Proceedings

That day, we won the vote. We did not lose. Two hundred and sixty-one members of Parliament voted in favour of our motion. Who were some of those 261 MPs who voted in favour of it? The member for Kingston and the Islands, for one, and the member for Winnipeg North, for another.

The member for Kingston and the Islands could answer my question by simply apologizing and saying that he did not understand, or that he never understands what we are voting on, or that he simply has no credibility.

Those would all be good answers, and I will let him choose one.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I was there for that, and I certainly do remember voting in favour of it, but I ask the member if there was an amendment put forward by the Bloc, because I specifically remember the Bloc pushing for this angle of the 25%. Whether it was through an amendment that was defeated or on another occasion completely, and I could be wrong, I know the Bloc has been pushing this matter, and I am also aware the House has shown that it is not interested in proceeding. If I remember correctly, I believe there was an amendment put forward, and it would have been that amendment the Bloc had put forward that was defeated, but I could be wrong.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague would be happy to know that there were a lot of cheers from this side of the House, in terms of seeing him again.

My colleague spoke a lot about democracy and the importance of it. Once again, we are seeing the Conservatives act as though they are champions of democracy, but then what we have here is a move to dictate and direct a committee in how it must proceed, after the House has already taken a position.

How does he feel Conservative members from Alberta might feel about this particular motion moving forward, triggering the 7/50 rule, when that would have significant consequences for proportional representation? How might Alberta members, who have not had a chance to consult with their communities, feel about the House dictating to a committee how to move forward?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, first I want to congratulate the member for Pickering—Uxbridge on the outstanding work she did in reaching out to her community, Uxbridge in particular, during the recent events that happened with the storm and the number of people who were displaced in one way or another. She really rose up and showed what it is to be an exemplary member of Parliament in terms of taking care of her constituents.

To her point, this is exactly what I was trying to say, which is that the Bloc Québécois wants to somehow tell the committee what to do, and we are past that point. The committee has been instructed on what to do. The committee has the work before it. The committee now has the opportunity to go out and talk to the public. The time for the politicians, with all due respect to my colleagues in the Bloc, is over, and now it is time to let the public speak. I want to hear what Quebecers have to say about this particular piece of legislation and where they stand on it.

Routine Proceedings

I do not know why the Bloc Québécois is afraid to hear what Quebecers actually have to say. Instead, its members seem more interested in trying to direct the discussion even more. Perhaps that is an indication they are worried about the outcome. I do not know, but I am just assuming.

• (1335)

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am surprised my colleague did not hear the cheering from the Liberal bench, and I am surprised he did not hear the heckling from this side of the House, because it was immense. It was a brouhaha. It was mayhem. I am surprised you did not intervene, Madam Speaker. I congratulate the member for actually causing that much dissension in this House, as he always does, because his comments are always so much on point that we all revel in the depth of his knowledge. Madam Speaker, thank you for not intervening in that discourse that happened back and forth.

I wonder if the member really understands the democracy he is speaking about here. Does he really understand that this did not come from the Conservative Party, which he criticizes all the time? It came from the Bloc Québécois, and maybe we are supposed to work together with other parties in the House of Commons at some points in time and get good things done for Canadians. Does he understand that concept?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I really wish he had just stopped after the first part of his question, because I thought it was just great. I look forward to being back in the House so we can do this in person.

To the member's question, why are the Conservatives against Bill C-18? The Conservatives will not let Bill C-18 be discussed in the House of Commons. Bill C-18 is about ensuring that news organizations are properly taken care of in this country. It is a bill that has content in it that was in the Conservative Party's platform in the election. I want to work together with the Conservatives, and I want to work with that member, but I cannot even seem to have a working relationship with them on issues that they, in the election, said they supported.

I encourage the member to find an issue we can work together on, as common as Bill C-18 appeared to be. Let us talk about how we can do that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the member for Kingston and the Islands, but I will point out for the member for Calgary Centre that we could have heard a pin drop in here. People were in rapt attention as the member for Kingston and the Islands spoke.

To pursue the question that the member alluded to in referring to losing time in this place and not getting to bills in debate, I am not pointing the finger at anyone in particular, because I am in the unique position of being able to say "a plague on all their houses" when things go awry in this place.

However—and I have made this point before—I would like the member for Kingston and the Islands to comment on what he thinks of the proposition that we would do better to follow our own rules, which say that no member can give a speech that is written. Ironi-

cally, it is even against our rules to use a lectern, although they are routinely handed out by the pages when people ask for them.

If we did not ignore the rule against written speeches, it would not be possible for the party backrooms to say to each other that they are not sure how many members they are going to put up on bill whatever. It might be that everybody wants to speak. Well, everybody does not want to speak, but everybody can be put forward like cannon fodder in a pointless partisan battle in here, instead of actually discussing bills.

In the Palace of Westminster, from which our rules derive, no member can stand up and read a speech. As a result, the people who speak to bills understand them thoroughly and can speak without notes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I will start by saying that I hold in highest regard the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, especially when it comes to describing events going on in the House. If she says we could have heard a pin drop in the room while I spoke, I totally believe her.

To her point, I agree completely with her, but more importantly, I also do not think it is important to always have to speak for 10 minutes or always speak for 20 minutes. I feel as though the reason some people feel the need to speak for a full 10 or 20 minutes, or whatever it might be, might be that they are worried that they will not be able to fill up the time. I personally think that there is nothing wrong with speaking for three or four minutes. If that is all a member has to say, then maybe that is all that needs to be said.

This is the kind of conversation I would have loved to have had on what we were supposed to discuss today, because I think this is the kind of thing that needs to come out. I also personally do not believe that the Speaker should hold a list of the people who are going to speak. Yes, we maintain the rotation, but it should be up to the Speaker to decide who is going to speak next, not the people in the backrooms.

• (1340)

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak again today on Bill C-14, a bill that we have already spoken on and have already sent away to committee. We find ourselves, or at least some of us in the House, speaking to Bill C-14.

In this bill, the government proposed to update the grandfather clause in the seat allocation formula. That was to ensure that no province would ever have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it did in 2021. That seemed to reflect what the House was asking for at the time, and it was something that Liberal colleagues were asking for in our caucus, and we know that this is also what the Bloc was asking for.

This updated clause speaks to the heart of the concerns that we have heard from Canadians and would ensure that all provinces would continue to have a strong voice in our House of Commons. Specifically, it would ensure that Quebec would not lose a seat. Again, this is what was being asked for. It would keep all existing protections in place and it would continue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, very quickly, I believe that the member was going to be splitting his time. I just wanted to make that point.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is not generally a point of order, but we had it done by the Conservative Party yesterday as well. I would ask members to be mindful that if they are going to be splitting their time, they should do it ahead of time. Forgetting to do that does happen to every member in the House, because they are just so anxious to start their speech.

Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have something to add?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Madam Speaker, I did forget, despite the many times that I reminded myself, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

As I was saying, this updated clause speaks to the heart of the concerns that we have heard from Canadians. It would ensure that all provinces would continue to have a strong voice in this House of Commons. Specifically, it would ensure that Quebec does not lose a seat, while keeping all existing protections in place and continuing to allow for incremental seat increases among provinces with growing populations without disruption to the redistribution of federal electoral districts in Canada.

As many of my colleagues know, the formal process of redrawing the electoral boundaries is a process that is required under law to take place every 10 years. It has begun. There are consultations right now. We are doing consultations in Nova Scotia, and there are quite significant changes being proposed, at least under the first tranche, and many members of our communities are reaching out to this commission and having their say.

I want to take this opportunity to speak about an important aspect of this very detailed and considered process, which is the independent and—something we probably do not get very often in our House—non-partisan commissions that are responsible for undertaking this important role.

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

The member for Winnipeg Centre said earlier that it is important that these folks get the communities of interest correct. It is not as easy as drawing a line straight up a highway, through a lake or along a river, although that is sometimes what we see in the first proposals. I do not know if it is because it is low-hanging fruit, but it is easy for the commission to do, and then it would take into consideration, one would expect, all of the public consultation.

This independent approach was introduced by design to eliminate the risk of political interference in the process and to maintain integrity and transparency in our democratic systems and institu-

tions. Before 1964, the House of Commons itself was responsible for fixing the boundaries of electoral districts through a committee appointed especially for that purpose, but Parliament realized that gerrymandering, a term used to describe the manipulation of riding boundaries to benefit members of the governing party, was a significant risk to the integrity of the system. That was and remains unacceptable. The introduction of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act was a critical measure put in place to solve that problem, and it was the right thing to do.

As outlined in the act, a three-member commission must be established for each province, and as I said, Nova Scotia has its commission set up and is currently receiving feedback from its citizens on all of the electoral boundaries. These commissions are composed of one chairperson and two commissioners.

As this process occurs over every 10 years, I would like to remind our hon. members that the government does not recommend or appoint members to these provincial commissions. They are independently appointed. In fact, the government's role in the entire process is extremely limited.

For example, the minister is responsible for receiving the census data from the chief statistician, for being notified of the appointment of new commissioners and for receiving the final reports from the commission. The minister is also responsible for facilitating the orders in council that are required to proclaim the establishment of the commissions and to proclaim the new electoral boundaries as set out by the commissions at the conclusion of the process.

It is also important to note once again that the government does not have any decision-making role or influence when it comes to how electoral boundaries are redrawn. That would be the commissioners' job, and that would hopefully reflect the feedback that they get from members of their community on how they see the boundaries being drawn or redrawn. It is entirely at the discretion of the independent provincial commissions.

The chief justices in each province are responsible for appointing a chairperson for each commission. In addition, the Speaker is responsible for appointing the two other members of the commissions. The chairperson of each commission is a sitting or, on a rare occasion, a retired judge. All members set aside their normal work and business to dedicate themselves to this democratic endeavour.

• (1345)

I, for one, would like to thank them for their service and thank them for listening to the members of the community who will be speaking on what is important to them as it pertains to their representation in the House of Commons of Canada.

Routine Proceedings

For commissioners, the act stipulates that they must reside in the province for which they are appointed. The act is also very clear in specifying that no person is eligible to be a member of the commission while that person is a member of the Senate or House of Commons or is a member of the legislative assembly or legislative council of a province. The independence of these commissions is further reinforced through this provision. In practice, the commissioners typically have a background in academia, law or non-elected public service. This knowledge and expertise allows these individuals to undertake this complicated but very important work.

In this 2021 decennial, as required under the act, 10 independent non-partisan electoral boundary commissions, one for each province, were established on November 1, 2021. With the release of the final census of 2021 data on February 9, 2022, the commissions began their review of the boundaries. As necessary, based on population changes and movements within each province, they will develop proposals to redraw electoral districts within each province, respecting communities of interest and taking in the very important feedback of citizens across Canada. Under the government's proposal, this work will continue uninterrupted.

For the Quebec commission, the legislation ensures that it will have the time that it needs, as prescribed under the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, to reconsider its boundary proposals and progress based on the updated grandfathered amendment.

Over the last 10 years, Canada's population has grown by 3.5 million people, from 33 million to nearly 37 million today, so it is essential that these citizens be factored into Canada's federal electoral districts. While they will endeavour to reflect changes in population against the province's seat count, commissions must also take into consideration other factors, again respecting communities of interest and historical patterns. They must also ensure electoral districts will maintain a manageable geographic size, including those ridings that are in rural or northern regions of any province. We all know MPs who have 10,000, 20,000, or 30,000 square kilometres. I personally represent a community of just over 100 square kilometres, so there is definitely a major difference in those boundaries.

Considering all of these factors is no small feat. We have a vast country. Our communities are diverse and very rich in culture and history. From coast to coast to coast, they form the basis of our identities and our connections. That is why the act contains provisions to ensure that these communities of interest are considered when it comes to determining reasonable electoral boundaries. Respecting communities of interest is not just about preserving the differences between provinces and regions or between rural and urban; it can mean recognizing the differences from one side of a small town to the other side of a small town. That, I must reiterate, is why it is so important that the commissions listen to the members of the public who speak out about the importance of their communities of interest.

Canada's history has shown us that redistribution is not just about balancing changes in population; it is all about balancing community, history, geography. It is a delicate balance of multiple and sometimes competing priorities. These complex considerations are precisely why these commissions are independent and, as I said before, non-partisan. It is essential that these decisions be made outside of

party lines. This way, boundary lines and ridings are established to serve Canadians best, not political parties.

Over the coming months, the commissions will hold public hearings open to the Canadian public, including members of Parliament. We are fortunate, along with all other Canadians—

● (1350)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member's time is up. I know he still has more to add, but I am sure it can be done through questions and comments.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, why does the hon. member want to prevent this House from debating the Standing Orders on the one day per Parliament set aside for doing precisely that?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Madam Speaker, this member speaks an awful lot in the House and I rarely enjoy what he has to say, but I have to say that the one time in every Parliament when we get a chance to speak on the Standing Orders is when that member is the most important. That is when that member speaks very intelligently and has an awful lot to say.

During his speech earlier, he had an awful lot of suggestions that I personally would love to have been hearing in a discussion on the Standing Orders. However, we are not there, because by watching how the Conservatives do it every day, the Bloc Québécois has figured out a way to delay the business of the House.

That member should take this up with the members of the Bloc.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think our colleague is being a bit harsh on the Conservative member, but in any case, I sense in his comments a bit of malice against the Bloc and how we operate in Parliament.

My question is simple. In his view, is the Bloc Québécois taking a democratic position today by proposing an amendment to this motion?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher: Madam Speaker, I sat on a committee with the member. He is a fabulous human being, and I want to thank him for all the work he does on behalf of Quebec. I personally love Quebec. I have been to Quebec City and Montreal, and they are absolutely beautiful. It is such an integral part of Canada.

This request has come before the House and has been agreed to. It is supposed to be before committee right now to let the process unfold as the process is meant to unfold, not in another day of delaying the business of the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I notice my hon. colleague mentioned in his speech the size of some ridings, the square kilometres and the distance to get from point A to point B in his riding. Does he agree that looking at the land mass that is included, especially in rural areas, should be a part of the process as well?

A lot of times there is only one way in and one way out, and it is often hard to get all parts of a riding. Even on a break week or a break weekend, for example, it is not very easy to get to a lot of the areas of a very geographically large riding.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Madam Speaker, the member represents a large community. He used the terms “break week” and “break weekend”, but I do not remember a time when the member got a break week or a break weekend. I know how difficult and all-consuming it is for the member, as well as members in Newfoundland, northern Canadian regions and rural communities, to properly represent their constituents.

I know the member does that with a smile on his face every day. When he speaks, we can hear his love for Newfoundland and Labrador and the people in that region. I know that he will go to the end of the earth for his constituents.

• (1355)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, if this motion from the Bloc Québécois passes, I am wondering if my hon. colleague from Halifax would also support some of the provinces, such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, that are structurally under-represented in Canada's Parliament. Would he be open to supporting changes to Bill C-14 that would give us representation by population?

I ask the member to imagine a scenario where Quebec had 1% below the average and lost three seats. That is what we live with every day, and I would love to hear the member's comments on that reality.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Madam Speaker, my friend called me the member for Halifax. There will be opportunities, when we are all back in the House, for the member for Halifax to maybe stroll across the aisle and have this question asked of him by the member from B.C.

This is a day where we need to be speaking about the Standing Orders, and we need to stop the delay tactics. The Bloc learned from the best, the best delay tactics party in Canada.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of the government's bill that would ensure no province has fewer seats in the House of Commons than it did in 2021.

As the great-grandson of an adopted Québécois, it is important for me personally to support Quebec maintaining its 78 seats in its representation. It was my father's grandfather who came over on a boat from Ireland, and it is a classic Canadian story that is shared so often. My great-grandfather came over on a boat with his parents, but both his parents passed away. His mother passed away on the boat and was given a burial at sea. His father then passed away as well, so he and his brother were orphaned on the boat.

When they arrived in Canada, and after being quarantined for a number of days, it was a rural Quebec family that adopted my great-grandfather with open arms, compassion and caring, and allowed him to keep the surname we so enjoy today. That is where our family had our start in Canada, in rural Quebec.

I am extremely pleased that following the seat allocation announcement last year, and as members of the House we were undoubtedly aware, the redistribution of federal electoral districts had begun, and that this bill would preserve the seats gained by Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia this decennial as announced by the Chief Electoral Officer last year.

This thoughtful and measured bill would also preserve Quebec's seat count at 78 seats. I would like to point out the government's amendment would not disrupt the independent redistribution process, and the bill would direct the CEO to reallocate the number of members of the House based on the updated grandfather rule.

We know that with this small change Quebec would not lose one seat. This updated clause would ensure all provinces could—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt.

There are a lot of conversations being held in the House, and it is really not very respectful of the person who has the floor. If members wish to have side conversation, I would ask them to please take them out into the lobby.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Madam Speaker, this is a very important subject. This particular government will allow for incremental seat increases in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia due to their growing provincial populations.

As my colleagues are aware, 10 independent provincial commissions were established in November 2021, with an exclusive role to play in the redistribution process. Under the government's proposal, this role would continue to be uninterrupted. These proposed amendments would minimize any disruption to the ongoing electoral boundary readjustment process. It is worth reviewing their work and timelines as set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

Before the provincial commission can begin their work, as I mentioned before, the Chief Electoral Officer is required to calculate the number of seats allocated to each province using the population estimate provided by Statistics Canada from the recent census, the last of which occurred on July 1, 2021, along with the formula set out in section 51 of the Constitution Act of 1867.

Statements by Members

The results of the seat allocation calculation were made public on October 15, 2021, with Ontario gaining one seat, Alberta gaining three and British Columbia gaining one. With the introduction of a 2021 grandfather clause, these seat gains would not be impacted. This means that under the government's bill, which I am pleased to support, no province will have less than the number of seats they had during the 43rd Parliament, which I had the honour of serving in 2021. Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia would maintain those seat increases.

It was a pleasure speaking on this important subject.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

CANADIAN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC ATHLETES

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians, today I want to congratulate our Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes who represented us at the recent summer and winter games. As we cheered from home, Team Canada delivered remarkable performances in sport excellence, bringing home 96 medals, achieving many personal bests and exemplifying fair play. The athletes represented Canada with grace, dignity and incredible focus.

[Translation]

While their journey has not always been easy over the past two years, as they have trained and persevered through the pandemic, our athletes have done what they do best. They have shown resilience, determination and a commitment to never give up.

[English]

These athletes are true models and inspire us all to be the best that we can be. The Government of Canada applauds their achievements and thanks them for representing our country so incredibly well. On behalf of all members of the House, I congratulate all our athletes.

SUMMER EVENTS IN CARIBOO—PRINCE GEORGE

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, after two long years of restrictions and lockdowns, it is great to see our country finally getting back to normal. In Cariboo—Prince George, our communities, friends and families have been through a lot, but despite the adversity, our Cariboo spirit is stronger than ever.

Summer is just around the corner and we are looking forward to welcoming back visitors from across Canada and around the world to take in some amazing events. Billy Barker Days Festival is back. The Vanderhoof International Airshow is back. Cariboo—Prince George is back.

This summer is going to be amazing. We are also hosting the 32nd BC Summer Games, and this year marks the first football season for the Prince George Kodiaks. Go Kodiaks.

As members know, rodeo season is my second-favourite time of the year. After a two-year hiatus, the Quesnel Rodeo is back, and the greatest show on dirt, the Williams Lake Stampede, is back. Yee-haw.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Madam Speaker, multiple sclerosis is Canada's disease. More than 90,000 Canadians live with MS, one of the highest rates of MS in the world. Every day 12 more Canadians are diagnosed with MS.

I recently met with the MS Society of Canada as part of MS Awareness Month and learned about the recent research breakthrough showing the strongest evidence to date of an association between the Epstein-Barr virus and the onset of MS.

I ask that we all harness this momentum and commit to increased funding for MS research so we can answer the most fundamental questions about MS: What causes it? Who gets it? How can we stop it? Together, we can ensure that Canada maintains its position as a world leader in MS research.

[Translation]

PROPOSED SENIORS' RESIDENCE IN MIRABEL

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House to speak for the residents and elected officials of Mirabel who are visiting Parliament Hill today. They are here for one reason only, and that is to tell the Minister of Transport that they need a seniors' residence in their community, in Sainte-Scholastique. Of course, I am thrilled to have them here, but I cannot help but think it is not right.

It is not right for an 80-year-old to have to travel 200 kilometres to appeal to a minister. It is not right to have to start a petition to get a minister's attention. It is not right to have to struggle for months, years even, to get a minister to listen. The right thing would be to let the seniors of Sainte-Scholastique grow old at home, without having to leave because they lack resources. My colleagues will agree with me that at a certain age, everyone deserves a dignified, peaceful and happy ending to their life.

On behalf of my constituents, I therefore ask the Minister of Transport to give the green light for a seniors' residence in Sainte-Scholastique. Let us give the green light to the Synergie Mirabel project.

• (1405)

OUTAOUAIS FILM FESTIVAL

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today marks the start of the 23rd annual Outaouais Film Festival, with actor and director Mariloup Wolfe as honorary chair. Over 80 films from 23 countries will be screened, to the delight of all film lovers.

In honour of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Canada, the festival will pay tribute to Moroccan culture with several cultural events. It will continue to feature local cinema, with 25% of the programming coming from Quebec. There will also be an exhibition of the work of artist Cedric Sequerra at Cinéma 9. I would like to congratulate the director, Didier Farré, and his entire team for their work on this excellent programming.

The Outaouais Film Festival will run from June 2 to 10, and I invite all my colleagues to visit Cinéma 9 in the Outaouais for the festival.

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[English]

LOBSTER FISHERY

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Madam Speaker, this past Tuesday marked the end of the six-month commercial lobster fishery for fishers in districts 33 and 34 in my beautiful riding of West Nova. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank fishers for their hard work.

Being out on the water is certainly not an easy job and can be quite unpredictable at times, but that is what makes this profession so unique and special. More importantly, it is the reason why fishermen take great pride in what they do.

It is with this same pride that I would like to express to them our deep admiration, and thank them for the incredible work that they do to consistently provide our community, province, country and world with the best-tasting lobster.

Thankfully, there were no major mishaps this season, but we should never forget all those we have unfortunately lost at sea over the past years.

Our lobstering heritage has a long and profound history, and I will always continue to proudly represent our hard-working lobster fishers here in our nation's capital.

Congratulations on another season, and I hope they enjoy their time off.

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[Translation]

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, June marks the beginning of a month of awareness for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a disease that currently has no cure. Unfortunately, there is still no treatment to reverse the progression of ALS.

Statements by Members

As one can imagine, this is a grim reality not only for patients, but also for their loved ones. I wish to thank the researchers who continue to work together to change the course of this disease. They provide hope in this respect.

[English]

I would also like to thank the family members, the caregivers, nurses and other individuals who care for these patients. Their services are indispensable and sincerely appreciated. If there is one lesson we can learn from COVID-19, it is that collaboration is key to combatting disease. Imagine if we applied the same strategy to combatting rare diseases and to finding treatments for rare diseases like ALS.

We must do better. I want to thank everyone involved.

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SHIRLEY HASLAM

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with a heavy heart I rise today to recognize a remarkable member of the Erin Mills community who passed away on May 30. Shirley Haslam was a constituent, a strong member of the Mississauga Erin Mills Women's Council and she was a dear friend.

Shirley was a teacher for 32 years and volunteered with the Arthritis Society and Scleroderma Society for many years. She leaves behind so many people whose lives she made better, mine included.

Shirley had this knack of slipping notes into purses and writing cards to her friends to share her thoughts. These notes were full of love and affirmations. I carry one of them in my wallet and I know it will always stay there. Her compassion, her love for life, her ability to hustle and her courage to always stand up for what was right defined her life and the memories that she leaves behind.

I share my condolences with her family, her friends and all the people who called her a hero. May she rest in peace.

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to thank all the folks in the North Okanagan—Shuswap supporting training and development opportunities to ensure a strong and safe Canada of tomorrow. At the Jean Minguy Memorial RCMP Youth Academy in Vernon, for over 20 years the RCMP in partnership with School District 22 has provided 16- to 18-year-old students with development opportunities in a week-long law enforcement boot camp at the academy.

Their recent graduation ceremony celebrated 26 cadets who completed their program toward a path of public service. I also joined the B.C. fire training officers conference in the Shuswap where fire training officers from B.C. connected to share and learn firefighting and lifesaving skills.

Statements by Members

Aerial firefighting tactics, water rescue and fire dynamics were just some of the skills training provided. It was exciting and reassuring to see youth and adult members learning skills to better protect our neighbours and our neighbourhoods from potential risks.

I commend and thank everyone from the students to the trainers and sponsors for making initiatives like these a reality to keep our communities more safe and secure.

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• (1410)

NATIONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS DAY

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Saturday is National Health and Fitness Day in Canada. I plan to swim, run and play tennis at different locations in my riding on Saturday. I will then join the Fitness Industry Council of Canada's social media challenge by posting pictures and using the hashtag #letsmovecanada.

I hope that all members will join me in working out and joining the social media challenge on Saturday. We can help show Canadians across the country how important it is for us to exercise to improve our physical and mental health.

As we emerge from COVID, it is vital for Canadians of all ages to get active. Sports and good health go together. The more we work out, the better we feel and the less we need to strain our health care system.

I encourage all Canadians to find some physical activity they enjoy this year and to make time to work out. Happy National Health and Fitness Day.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the cost of living spiralling out of control, many Canadians are struggling, worried about their ability to provide for their family's future and the direction that our country is headed in.

Sadly, the out-of-control spending and divisive and regressive policies of our Liberal Prime Minister have turned Canada into "Can'tada": "Can't" afford to buy or rent a home, "can't" afford gas, "can't" afford groceries, "can't" keep a small business open, "can't" retire, "can't" protest, "can't" express dissent, "can't" get a straight answer from government, "can't" work hard to get any further ahead.

Under the Liberals, everyday life has become unaffordable. There are limited opportunities for students, working parents, seniors, first nations communities, new Canadians, small business owners and everyone else. Canadians need relief. They need hope and confidence in the future. That is why Conservatives will continue to stand up for ordinary Canadians and will ensure to fight so that the true north remains strong and free.

LYTTON DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are quickly approaching the one-year anniversary of the wildfire that decimated the village of Lytton on June 30. While we have been so encouraged by recent progress, residents still remain displaced. Lytton residents deserve so much more.

I want to give a shout-out to the Fort Berens Estate Winery in Lillooet, B.C. and encourage everyone to participate in its fundraiser campaign called "Lytton Strong", with a goal to raise \$125,000 towards a new rec centre in Lytton. The fundraiser does not officially kick off until tomorrow, but \$50,000 has already been raised.

The grapes grown as part of their pinot gris label are from a small vineyard in Lytton, which was thankfully not consumed by the fire. The 2021 crop will go towards a special edition wine, with 100% of the proceeds going towards the Lytton Strong fundraiser for a community rec centre.

Please help restore our community, and get some fantastic wine in the process. Check out fortberens.ca to participate. Come on Canada, please get behind Lytton. We need the help.

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UXBRIDGE STORM DAMAGE

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 21, a storm ripped across Ontario and Quebec, which left people in Pickering—Uxbridge without power. We saw trees go down and property be damaged throughout our community.

During the storm, a tornado touched down in Uxbridge and caused a devastating impact. We saw cars and trucks completely flipped over, several homes and businesses destroyed or damaged, and countless trees ripped out of the ground, which destroyed power lines. The roof of Trinity United Church collapsed, and The Second Wedge Brewing Company, which is a beloved local hub for craft beer, arts, culture and food, and is even the location of our farmers' market, was destroyed.

Despite the heartbreaking destruction, we saw the community step up in a very big way. I would like to highlight and thank the incredible local first responders, the various crews responsible for cleanup, repairs, and restoring our electricity, and the mayor and council as well as town staff who worked around the clock to assist their neighbours in a time of need. This combined effort of everyone involved is the purest embodiment of the Canadian spirit and the bonds that hold us together.

● (1415)

FILIPINO HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to mark the beginning of Filipino Heritage Month in Canada.

I am privileged to represent a riding that is blessed with one of the largest communities of Filipino Canadians in the nation. It is full of dynamic, creative and talented people who contribute so much to our society, culture and economy. From the health sector to the business world, from the arts to the professions, the energy and skills of the Filipino community infuse every part of our lives.

June will be full of memorable events for Filipino Canadians and their families. These include gathering at the Filipino Plaza in Vancouver Kingsway to proudly raise the Philippine flag. We will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Filipino Seniors Club of B.C. We will mark Philippines Independence Day and announce exciting steps toward building a Filipino cultural centre. There will be pageantry, music and pride galore.

Throughout, all of the kindness, generosity and joy that is so characteristic of the Filipino spirit will shine through and inspire us all.

Mabuhay Filipino Canadians.

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[Translation]

AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, June is ALS Awareness Month, and since today is Lou Gehrig Day, I am calling on each of us to recognize how important it is for Health Canada to speed up its review of an Amylyx treatment for ALS.

In the member's statement I made last year about this day, I shared my experience as a caregiver for my father, who had this disease for 20 years. I expressed hope that a treatment capable of slowing its progression would be found. We are close.

I urge Health Canada to work even harder to get this treatment approved quickly. Time is limited.

To all those with ALS, to their loved ones and to advocacy organizations, I say keep fighting.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are less safe today than they were when the Liberal government took office.

The Liberals are not trying to keep communities safe, and they are not making an effort to keep dangerous criminals in jail. The Liberals' dangerous Bill C-5 eliminates mandatory jail time for violent crimes like weapons trafficking and possession of a weapon that was illegally obtained.

Oral Questions

The Liberals do not seem to have a clue when it comes to what to do with serious issues like gun violence. The Liberals are telling Canadians that Bill C-5 reverses Conservative policies, but this bill actually repeals laws that were established under previous Liberal governments. The government has in fact kept most Conservative laws on the books.

The changes to the Criminal Code imposed by Bill C-5 are a radical shift away from long-standing and bipartisan values and will make communities in Canada less safe. Victims, their families and communities are asking the government to abandon Bill C-5.

* * *

PORTUGUESE HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Pedro da Silva was the first known Portuguese person to arrive in pre-Confederation Canada in 1673. He was also the first officially commissioned letter carrier. Hundreds of years later, in 1953, a group of Portuguese immigrants arrived on a boat named *Saturnia*, docking at Pier 21. These new immigrants started the first of many waves of Portuguese to start a new life in Canada.

Now, almost 70 years later, Portuguese Canadians are 100 million strong, living in communities right across Canada. They are builders, musicians, athletes, business leaders, chefs, teachers and politicians, among so many other professions. Their contributions and stories have enriched Canadian society and have transformed Canada not only into a better country, but also one of the best countries in the world to live in.

As a member of Parliament of the riding with the largest number of Portuguese Canadians, I am proud to rise in the House today to mark the beginning of Portuguese Heritage Month in Canada. Whether by listening to fado, drinking vinho verde or eating a bifana, I invite all Canadians to join me in celebrating all things Portuguese this month.

Feliz mês de Portugal. Obrigado, Senhor Presidente.

● (1420)

The Speaker: Before continuing, while I have your attention, I just want to remind everyone that Standing Order 31 statements are 60 seconds. I know we have let it go a little longer, but now it is getting to the point where it is kind of dragging on. I know they are very important, and I do not want to have to cut anyone off. Practise hard and practise to make it under 60 seconds. This is a request.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “[g]overnment and its information must be open by default”.

Oral Questions

That was the big promise that the Prime Minister made to Canadians in 2015. Seven years later, that promise has melted away like snow on a sunny day. We have never seen a government as closed off, as opaque or as quick to redact as the one led by this Prime Minister. We recently learned that the government has adopted 72 secret orders in council.

Why are the Liberals so afraid to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Our government has always made it a priority to be open and transparent with all Canadians while also taking care not to compromise national security. That is why, through the Investment Canada Act, we are ensuring that major investments and transactions benefit the Canadian economy, something I think all parliamentarians would agree with. Because of the confidentiality requirements of the act concerning the disclosure of certain information on specific and limited transactions, we will always protect national interests.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do you want me to list more Liberal secrets?

There was SNC-Lavalin, the paid vacations, the WE Charity scandal, the Winnipeg lab documents. The Information Commissioner of Canada is receiving more complaints than ever before, and now the Prime Minister and his cabinet are keeping 72 decisions secret.

“[I]t is time to shine more light on government to make sure it remains focused on the people it was created to serve—you.” Those were the Prime Minister's words in 2015.

When did Canadians stop being his priority?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that all Canadians watching today understand that our government has always been transparent, but as I was explaining to my colleagues on the other side, we also have a responsibility as a government to protect national security. That is why, in certain circumstances, when it is in the national interest, we will continue to be transparent on every level. However, there are certain occasions when we must maintain confidentiality, in the national interest.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was another murder this week in Laval, in the middle of a restaurant, right in front of diners. People are afraid. Criminals no longer fear the police, who in turn feel abandoned by the Liberal government.

Instead of sending a strong message to armed criminal gangs, with Bill C-5, the Prime Minister announced that they will be able to serve their sentences at home. Even Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1976 understood the need for minimum sentences for armed criminals.

Why do today's Liberals want to make life easier for criminals?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we introduced Bill C-5 precisely to address the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in the justice system.

Minimum sentences and conditional sentences are imposed by judges when public order and public safety are not at risk and incarceration is not the answer.

We will therefore move forward with public safety reforms to improve our criminal justice system.

[English]

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Montreal police suspect that organized crime was involved when suspects entered a restaurant in Laval last night and shot a man to death while he was having dinner. Criminals are becoming more brazen, yet the Liberals still want to make sure that repeat offenders of violent crime will not face mandatory jail time with their soft-on-crime Bill C-5.

Will the Prime Minister abandon this soft-on-crime agenda and abandon Bill C-5?

● (1425)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member full well knows that serious offences will always be punished with serious sentences. The kinds of crimes that he is referring to will never be the subject of a minimum mandatory penalty, because they are serious in terms of their context.

Minimum mandatory penalties in the provisions that we are addressing, as well as conditional sentence orders, are only to be used by judges when there is no danger to public security.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are urgently calling for help with rising gun crime rates, but the Liberals' Bill C-5, to be perfectly clear, will put repeat offenders of violent gun crimes back into Canadian communities.

In light of out-of-control gun violence, will the Liberals abandon their soft-on-crime Bill C-5?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are taking action to keep communities safe. We are increasing penalties for those who break the law. We are strengthening protections to prevent gender-based violence. We are fighting gun crime. We are freezing the market for handguns.

This is about the survivors and about all Canadian communities. They are too often touched by gun violence. Canadians told us they want to see more action more quickly and we are following through on our commitment to do more.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers democratically directed their elected representatives in the National Assembly of Quebec to protect state secularism. The National Assembly did just that by passing Bill 21. That is how democracy works.

Any federal Liberals who want to do politics in the National Assembly need only quit their job and run in the Quebec election on October 3.

That is not what they chose to do, though. They chose to run for a seat in another Parliament and to govern Canada. Why not focus on that instead of trying to subvert Quebec's democracy?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am a Quebecer, and I am among those who have doubts about Bill 21. We stand with Quebecers who are angry and disappointed that a young teacher can no longer exercise her profession because of how she chooses to observe her religion.

Our government is deeply committed to defending the rights and freedoms protected by the Canadian and Quebec charters of rights and freedoms, and that includes freedom of religion and the right to equality.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he should run in Quebec. I am sure Dominique Anglade would take him.

He and a handful of his colleagues are trying to overturn the democratic choice of the majority of Quebecers. Ottawa is telling Quebecers that they do not have the right to protect state secularism. Ottawa is saying no to Bill 21. Ottawa refuses to transfer immigration powers. Ottawa is going to say no to Bill 96.

If the federal government keeps saying “no”, will that not help convince Quebecers to say “yes”?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for once the Bloc Québécois is saying why they are really here. They are in Ottawa only to prepare for sovereignty. That is what they have always said. It is their entire raison d'être, while everyone else is here to try to advance society, Quebec and Canada together.

There is something sad about putting immigration at the heart of the debate, because immigration is about men, women and children coming here for a better life. The Bloc members want to play partisan politics with this, which is sad.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, half the people who use food banks and half the people who are homeless in Canada are persons with disabilities.

A year ago, the Liberals introduced a bill on benefits, but did nothing with it. They had a year to hold consultations and today they are introducing the exact same bogus bill. Worse yet, the minister says that it will take another three years before people receive anything.

Oral Questions

Why do the Liberals always pretend to be concerned about persons with disabilities? Why not bring in these benefits immediately?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada disability benefit has the potential to lift hundreds of thousands of working-age Canadians with disabilities out of poverty. Since we committed to creating this benefit, we have worked non-stop with the disability community and with the provinces and territories. We are a lot closer now than where we were to getting this done.

We need to be absolutely sure that provinces and territories do not claw back existing benefits. We need to be sure that the needs and desires of the disability community are reflected in this benefit. That is why we are working with all of these partners to make sure people are better off.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians with disabilities are living in poverty. The government did not prioritize them after its unnecessary election, and now we have lost a year. This morning, the minister said it could take up to three years before the first person receives the Canada disability benefit. The Liberals started promising this support in 2015. With these timelines, the Liberals will take 10 years to get people the support they need.

Why did the government turn its back on Canadians living with disabilities by wasting a year?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada disability benefit is about lifting people out of poverty. It is about addressing the financial insecurity faced by far too many working-aged Canadians with disabilities in our country. I was so excited weeks ago when we passed a unanimous consent motion in the House and all parties agreed this should be a priority. If we want to make this happen quickly, let us do that again and get this done.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals claim to care about the safety of Canadians, the fact is that since the government was elected, gun crimes have gone up steadily every year. They talk a big game, but the fact is that they have ignored gun safety and put politics first at every opportunity. Now they want to allow violent offenders to avoid jail and serve their sentences in their communities with their victims.

Oral Questions

Why is the government so committed to putting criminals ahead of victims?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have introduced Bill C-5 to attack the systemic overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in our criminal justice system. It would attack mandatory minimum penalties and allow conditional sentence orders where public safety is not in danger and where incarceration is not best for the community, the victim or the perpetrator.

With respect to violent crime, we have increased penalties with respect to gun trafficking and guns. As has been pointed out, we have also introduced bold legislation capping handguns in this country.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservative MPs would welcome an honest discussion about how gun crime has gone up every year since the government was elected. The fact is that its legislation, Bill C-5, would eliminate mandatory jail time for violent gun crime and allow criminals to serve their sentences in the comfort of their own homes, something their victims can no longer do.

Why is the government so committed to putting criminals ahead of victims?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Let us have an honest discussion.

Serious offences will always have serious consequences in our system. The kinds of penalties we would be attacking by eliminating certain mandatory minimum penalties and allowing conditional sentence orders are precisely the kinds of sentences where a person, the community and victims are not served and where the problem is something else, like a health problem or a problematic addiction, for example.

We are moving ahead with these reforms to address the systemic overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in the system to make the system more just.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian research shows that when the extreme intoxication defence is available, it is successful in 30% of cases. Some 71% of these cases involved male violence against women. Yesterday we heard from the Minister of Justice that this defence would only be used in a small minority of cases, but I want to remind the minister that even one is too many.

The lack of an immediate response from the government is dangerous. When will the Liberal government take the direction of the Supreme Court and close this loophole?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said to the hon. member, and to reassure Canadians first and foremost, this defence is in fact available in only a very small fraction of cases. Nevertheless, we are looking at the Supreme Court decision. We understand the seriousness of the situation, and I can ensure all parliamentarians in the House, and indeed all Canadians, that we are looking at ways to address the situation.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to make fine speeches about the safety of Canadians, but he clearly has a rather lax attitude about it.

For example, as a result of the changes he made to the parole board, a violent criminal was released, which led to the murder of Marylène Levesque.

Federal inmates now have access to syringes, and drug trafficking in penitentiaries is on the rise. Bill C-5 will allow dangerous criminals to serve their sentence at home instead of in a penitentiary. The Prime Minister rolled out the red carpet to criminals.

What has he done lately for victims?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to the victims, and we are working on improving the justice system to help victims and Canadian society.

With Bill C-5, we are tackling the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples and Blacks in the system, in cases where it does not put public safety at risk. Conditional sentences and the elimination of certain minimum sentences will help us to attack the real problems by helping victims and society.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the government wants to tackle real problems, let us talk about illegal arms trafficking, which is a scourge in Canada. Instead of attacking the source of the problem, the Prime Minister is attacking law-abiding citizens.

Police forces have repeatedly said that the guilty parties are street gangs and organized crime, which operate in different parts of Canada and use transit points such as the Akwesasne Reserve. It is no secret that this spot on the Canada-U.S. border is the busiest in Canada.

Why has the Prime Minister not yet met with the chief of the Akwesasne reserve to discuss the problem of illegal firearms on our streets and work with him to find solutions?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that the chief from Akwesasne actually appeared at the public safety committee and was able to present their concerns about the border.

Oral Questions

Last year, CBSA seized a record number of illegal firearms. We realize we have to do more, which is why we invested over \$350 million in law enforcement to stop the flow of illegal gun trafficking. What did the Conservatives do? They opposed these investments.

When it comes to protecting our borders from illegal gun trafficking, the Conservatives are all talk and no action.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' soft stance on crime only helps criminals. They are too tolerant of lawbreakers.

The poor victims in all of this are our children, who are not even protected. This government has no regard for law-abiding Canadians and their safety. A responsible government would make Canadians safer.

Why does this government put criminals ahead of victims?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do have a plan when it comes to public safety. I am always curious why the Conservatives say they are the party that supports victims, unless those victims are the victims of gun crimes and then they are demonized and the Conservatives support the gun lobby in attacking them. We put in place stronger background checks. The Conservatives opposed them. We invested over \$350 million in law enforcement to prosecute gangs and stop trafficking at the border. The Conservatives opposed it.

When it comes to keeping Canadians safe and keeping guns out of the hands of criminals, the Conservatives have no plan, and we do.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, former Italian prosecutor Roberto Scarpinato, who spent his life going after the Mafia, said last week that Canada is a paradise for the mafia.

When an Italian prosecutor says that Canada is extremely attractive to the Mafia because it offers the best opportunities to get rich, it is time to do something. Canada is a paradise for all organized crime groups, which is why we need an organized crime registry to identify these groups and make it easier for police to do their job.

This morning I introduced Bill C-279 to create such a registry. Does the government plan to support this bill?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with the Quebec government to reduce gun violence. The Minister of Public Safety recently attended a forum in Montreal. We have directed \$40 million under our guns and gangs funds to the Legault government. We are finalizing a transfer under our building safer communities fund to prevent gun crimes specifically for Quebec, and the minister continues to engage directly with his counterparts in Quebec.

● (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are doing such a good job that last night in Laval, a close associate of the Mafia was shot in the middle of a restaurant in front of children. Bill C-21 is clearly not curbing conflict between crime groups.

Organized crime is behind the wave of shootings in Montreal. These groups are importing illegal weapons and using them freely on our streets. The government needs to open its eyes and help police stop this scourge.

Do the government members understand how important and urgent it is to create an organized crime registry?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do take the issue of gun safety very seriously. That is why we introduced a bill this week that is going to bring in the strongest measures that we have seen in a generation, including a freeze on handguns, the number one gun that is used in crime. We are taking the issue seriously. We are working with stakeholders across the country, including the police, to make sure that we keep Canadians safe.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately that is nonsense.

What we are proposing is nothing new. It is the same principle as the list of terrorist entities. Right now, being a member of a recognized terrorist entity is illegal and an arrestable offence.

We must remember that just last year the government added 13 groups to that list, including the notorious Proud Boys. That is a good thing, but why is the government softer on outlaw bikers, the mafia and street gangs?

If the minister believes that having a list of entities helps fight terrorism, does he not think it would be equally useful in fighting organized crime?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank the hon. member for his passion on this issue and his advocacy on the issue. It is important. That is why we have brought forward legislation that would keep guns out of the hands of criminals. We also put in place background checks when we introduced Bill C-71. We are investing in law enforcement to prosecute gangs and stop trafficking at the border.

When it comes to the issue of gun violence, this government is taking action, and I am proud to stand on the record that we have.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when urban millennials read the Youthful Cities index, it is clear the Minister of Housing has failed. The average young person's budget takes a \$750-a-month hit just for living in a city. A new, shiny savings account for a home will not help these millennials, as inflation outpaces their wages. There are no savings to be had. The only thing this minister has delivered to them in seven years is a doubling of housing prices.

Does the minister comprehend that all of his empty talk on housing affordability has made a whole generation of Canadian millennials cynical about politics and about the current government?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of hot air to cover 10 years of inaction on housing. We are the government that brought back national leadership on housing. We are investing more than ever before to help Canadians access their dream of home ownership. Every time in this House when we have brought measures to help Canadians access—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to have to ask the minister just to pause for a moment. I understand the minister is rather far from the Speaker's chair, so I want to make sure that I can hear everything and I want everyone else to hear the answer.

The minister can start right from the top.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Speaker, the reason they cannot handle my answer is that I am exposing their bankrupt policies and their fake rhetoric in this House. For 10 years, they had a chance to invest in affordable housing and provide national leadership on an important issue for Canadians. What did they do? They downloaded housing to provinces and municipalities. One would think that they would learn from their time in opposition. Even today, the members of their caucus always talk about how we should withdraw from our affordable housing investments. Shame on them.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1445)

The Speaker: Order. I just want to remind the hon. members that if they are going to heckle and the person next to them has a question, or an answer for that matter, it is not good to shout be-

cause they are within reach of the microphone. That is just a little pointer for members.

The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Fort Nelson, B.C., the rising cost of gas and tax increases are having a huge impact on small businesses already struggling to survive. Dave Milner and Bev Vandersteen of the Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce warned that if urgent action is not taken by the Prime Minister, more businesses will fail, leaving people unemployed and families in crisis. According to RBC, there is not a single city in Canada that is affordable for young people. These businesses, the people who run them and young Canadians are the backbone of our communities. Why does the government continue to punish them?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that small businesses are the backbone of all of our communities across Canada. It is why, throughout the pandemic, we were there for them, supporting them every single step of the way. I am so pleased that we continue to work with small businesses, and I would encourage us all to work together to support our businesses and the wonderful workers they employ, so that they can get on the economic road to recovery, because they very much are a part of our economic future.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the fuel crisis, the tone-deaf response from the government is that it has Canadians' backs. It cites the carbon tax rebate and, of course, the misinformation on cutting taxes for the middle class. My constituents are struggling. They are fearful. They are angry. The challenge is paying for fuel at the expense of feeding and clothing their kids.

The government should start listening to Canadians. Instead of blaming external factors, the government has the power to do the right thing. Will it immediately cut the crippling carbon and excise taxes on gasoline?

Oral Questions

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to kids and families, our government has been there every step of the way. In 2015, we introduced the Canada child benefit, lifting 300,000 Canadians families out of poverty. In fact, in the member's riding of Brantford—Brant, families that have children in child care will soon be receiving a 25% reduction in fees, and by the end of this year, that fee will be reduced by 50%. That might be up to \$400 or \$500 a month in people's pockets. That is real money helping Canadian families, helping Canadian kids, meet the high cost of living.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers and communities across Canada are deeply concerned about the government's hands-off approach to rail safety. At the transport committee, we heard witness after witness call for government action to keep workers safe. Among the committee's recommendations is ensuring that private rail police are not the ones to investigate workplace incidents.

Will the minister please tell us why, in 2022, multi-billion-dollar rail corporations are still allowed to investigate themselves when workers are killed on the job?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, rail safety is a priority for our government. We have been working closely with stakeholders and rail companies to ensure that we have the highest standard of safety in Canada. We have implemented programs to support communities so they can enhance safety at crossings. We are following up on recommendations by the Transportation Safety Board.

We will stop at nothing to ensure that we have the highest safety in Canada.

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HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in Alberta are devastated by the toxic drug crisis. A record number of Albertans lost their lives to the poisoned drug supply last year. We are in the same situation as B.C. This is a national public health crisis and the federal government has an obligation to protect lives. Yesterday, the Liberals had an opportunity to follow the evidence-based advice of their own experts. Instead, they voted with the Conservatives and let Canadians die.

Why does the government think that the lives of people in British Columbia are more important than those of Albertans?

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, the French interpretation was not available.

The Speaker: The member did not hear the question.

[English]

It is working now.

I will ask the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona to repeat her question, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, people in Alberta are devastated by the toxic drug crisis. A record number of Albertans lost their lives to the poisoned drug supply last year. Our situation is the same as in B.C. This is a national public health crisis and the federal government has an obligation to act. Yesterday, the Liberals voted with the Conservatives, against the advice of their own experts, to let Canadians die.

I would like to know why the lives of Albertans are not seen to be as important as those in B.C.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is totally committed to ending the overdose crisis nationally. Bill C-216 would have immediately decriminalized possession of illegal drugs without addressing the complex issues of implementation.

Our government is moving forward on decriminalization through a responsible framework and in partnership with a jurisdiction that has a comprehensive plan that includes health and social supports, public engagement, law enforcement training, oversight and evaluation. Successful implementation of the exemption in B.C. will inform the approach of other jurisdictions, as well as a future national approach.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that working-age persons with disabilities in Canada are twice as likely to live in poverty as those without disabilities. This is unacceptable. That is why this government is taking historic measures to build a disability inclusive Canada.

This morning, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion tabled legislation for the Canada disability benefit. Can the minister please share with us how this will help lift Canadians with disabilities out of poverty?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Newmarket—Aurora for his tireless work and advocacy for persons with disabilities.

On this sixth annual National AccessAbility Week, I was proud to reintroduce legislation for the Canada disability benefit, an income supplement for working-age persons with disabilities. The CDB has the potential to significantly reduce poverty, to improve financial security and to help hundreds of thousands of people.

Oral Questions

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct the long-standing social and economic exclusion that has hurt far too many Canadians.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure I have this right. First, the Liberals impose a tariff on fertilizer that only punishes Canadian farmers. Second, they ignore any plea for an exemption on the fertilizer purchased before March 2. Third, they are offering no compensation, meaning that higher taxes and input costs are crushing Canadian farm families.

How many other G7 countries are enforcing a fertilizer tariff and putting their farmers at a competitive disadvantage?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep proposing policies that they have not really fully thought through. Rising gas prices are a global phenomenon, as we all know, due in part to the war that Putin started in Ukraine. If we implement a tax holiday, as the Conservatives have been proposing for a number of weeks now, energy companies could actually pocket—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary.

I am having a hard time hearing her answer and I am sure the hon. member for Foothills wants to hear her answer as well. I am going to ask everyone to calm down and take a deep breath. The chatter is starting to build again.

The hon. parliamentary secretary, from the top, please.

• (1455)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, it seems that my answer is garnering a lot of interest on the other side of the House. The gist of my response is that the Conservatives have been proposing a number of economic measures that they have not thought through, whether they are with respect to the gas tax or fertilizer. What they are proposing is simply a tax holiday, which in no way guarantees that the consumer or our farmers will benefit at the end of the day.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please allow me to actually answer the question for the parliamentary secretary. The answer is zero.

Canada is the only country punishing its farmers with a tariff on fertilizer. Our G7 allies are doing everything they possibly can to ensure that their farmers can increase their yields in a time of global food insecurity. Here, the Liberals are beating our farmers down with increased taxes, red tape and, without any consultation with stakeholders, a mandate to reduce fertilizer use by 30%.

Knowing this, is the fertilizer tariff just another way for the Liberals to impose their activist agenda and force our farmers to use less fertilizer?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, our goal is to reduce emissions caused by fertilizers. This is not the same as using less fertilizer.

We fully understand that fertilizers are important for our agricultural producers and for our food security.

We are working closely with the industry, with Fertilizer Canada and with many sectors that support us, that want to do more and that appreciate our subsidies, including those for clean technologies and best practices.

[English]

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is doing nothing for food security. Day after day, the Liberals claim that Saskatchewan farm families are actually making money from their carbon tax. That is hogwash. In fact, a producer told me his rebates would not even cover two weeks' worth of fuel since the Liberals last unfair carbon tax increase. My friend's cost to run his equipment is now \$90,000 a week.

As other G7 countries around the world provide tax relief, and with the world's third-largest producer of wheat in a war zone right now, what is the government doing to not punish our farmers and allow them to produce the food the world needs?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I assure my colleagues that we are here to support our farmers and increase production.

At the moment, there is an illegal war happening in Ukraine. We know that Ukraine is a major producer. Canadian farmers want to do more. Our government is there to support them in various ways.

We had an historic budget for agriculture last year. This shows that we are there for the agricultural sector and we are supporting them in various ways.

[English]

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no farms, no food. Fertilizer prices are up 50% this year, plus 20% more since the Liberals put the tariff on. That is a 70% increase since last year. They say not to bite the hand that feeds us, but the Liberal government has bitten the hand right off. Its poor decisions are pricing farmers out of business.

Without farmers, Canadians do not have food. Without farmers, where will our food come from?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, our government has provided unprecedented support to agricultural producers. A total of \$4 billion—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Is everyone ready to continue?

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Speaker, I repeat, our government has done more than any other to help our agricultural producers. We invested \$4 billion to support them last year. That is unprecedented.

Recently, \$1.5 billion was invested in all our agri-environmental initiatives. I can assure the House that our agricultural producers know they are part of the solution in the fight against climate change because they are the first to feel the impact.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government literally just stole \$342 million from Quebec. It promised to give Quebec leftover money from the public transit infrastructure fund and the clean water and wastewater fund. It is right there in black and white in the Canada-Quebec infrastructure agreement the feds signed in 2018.

On Monday, however, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities plainly stated he has no intention of honouring the agreement.

Will he backtrack immediately and announce his intention to give Quebec the \$342 million he owes us?

• (1500)

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, our government and our minister are committed to getting funds out for transit and infrastructure right across this country, including in Quebec. However, the minister has been clear that Quebec needs to put forward the project, which we can then support.

We are committed to our agreements and ensuring that Quebec has the amounts that have been promised, but they need to step up and identify those projects. We will ensure that transit and infrastructure continue to be built right across this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an agreement is something to be honoured. Not only is Ottawa taking away \$342 million from Quebec, but it is threatening to take away another \$4 billion by unilaterally changing the deadline for infrastructure projects.

Oral Questions

The signed agreement gave Quebec until 2025 to submit projects. Ottawa is shortening that to 2023. This means that if Quebec does not submit all of its projects in the next 10 months, when it should have three years to do so, Ottawa could deprive us of \$4 billion. This shows a total lack of respect for Quebecers. It is our money.

Will the government keep its promises and give this money to Quebec?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have not cut a single cent for transit or infrastructure in Quebec. These projects need to be identified. The Quebec government should tell us what its priorities are. Then we will happily move forward on these agreements.

This is about Canadian taxpayers' investments in transit and infrastructure right across this country. We want to ensure that those projects are identified and this money can roll out across Quebec to ensure that it has the transit and infrastructure it needs.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen democratic decline in Canada under the Liberals, and this is no more true than with the Winnipeg lab documents. NDP members have completely betrayed themselves and the promises they made in the last election. It turns out that this coalition is serving up the worst of both parties: The Liberals are adopting NDP economics and the NDP is adopting the Liberals' culture of secrecy.

Why is the NDP-Liberal government blocking Parliament's access to these documents?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a different definition of "blocking". The truth is that the opposition Conservatives asked to look at these documents and were given the opportunity at NSI-COP, but they did not want to take the opportunity, which is fine. We provided another mechanism that was based on the same mechanism they used for Afghan detainees. It was a system Mr. Harper and many of those in his caucus then, who are here today, thought was a good system. We agreed; we offered it.

I would ask the member opposite why he is refusing to look at these documents. It is a very bizarre thing to stand up and demand to look at something we are trying to show him.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just these documents. That is just one of many actions being taken by the NDP-Liberal coalition government.

Oral Questions

Let me give other examples. Ministers can now end democratic debate without notice, just at will. In addition to that, of course, documents are being refused to be granted with regard to the study of the Emergencies Act. In addition to that, the members opposite are now moving Bill C-11, which would shut down our ability to use the Internet with freedom. It would control what we can see, what we can hear and what we can post online.

Why is the government so determined to kill democracy?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in the opposition when Stephen Harper was the prime minister. I recall an over 200-page handbook on how to frustrate committees, shut down the House and obstruct process. I find it—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sure everybody wants to hear the answer to that question.

I will ask the hon. government House to start from the top, please.

• (1505)

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the question of these documents. Again, not only can they see the documents, but we said that if they want to challenge the redactions, they can do so to an independent panel of jurists, who will make a decision on what can be made public. Yes, they can look at them. Yes, they can challenge the redactions if they want them to be public. Excuse me for being confused as to why they are getting upset when I am saying yes, they can.

Come and look at the documents; they are available. There is a process they can participate in. Other parliamentarians are participating in it. I think they are confusing themselves with the previous government.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Stockholm is the global authority on evaluating the performance of democracies. It provides objective analysis on the health of democracies. In the key category of checks on government, Canada's score has dropped precipitously since 2015. We are now lower than the United States and every single country in western Europe. Weakening checks on government power is weakening Canadian democracy, and international experts are noticing.

When will the government face up to the problem it is causing and commit to reversing democratic decline in Canada?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about some of the things we do not do. What we do not do is use parliamentary secretaries in committee to control committees and not allow members to ask questions. That is what the members on the opposite side did. They frustrated committees and used parliamentary secretaries to shut down debate and not allow democratic processes to work. It was command and control all the time, 24-7.

Instead, what we have said, and again this line of questioning confuses me, is that if they want to look at documents, we have offered not only one but two separate processes. They have an opportunity to challenge redactions to make them public.

They do not get to decide what goes public. We do not get to decide what goes public. National security needs to be independently protected.

* * *

[Translation]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's aerospace industry is a world leader and a major asset to the entire Quebec and Canadian economy. The government continues to support the aerospace industry with concrete action because we know that it is the right thing to do.

Can the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry provide us with an update on the impact that our support is having on the industry, the supply chain, and, most importantly, the aerospace workers?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question and for the hard work that he does every day for the entire region.

I was pleased for all aerospace workers to announce that our government has awarded an \$800 million contract to Bell Textron in Mirabel, Quebec, to extend the life of the Royal Canadian Air Force's fleet of 85 Griffon helicopters until 2030.

This is great news for Mirabel workers, great news for Quebec, and great news for Canada's aerospace industry as a whole.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, budget 2022 allocates \$25 million to the continued mandatory use of the ArriveCAN app, yet it failed to extend important tourism recovery programs for businesses that still needed the help. The government has been warned that the ArriveCAN app is impacting travel to Canada.

What is more important to the Liberal-NDP government: funding ArriveCAN, which clogs up our borders and deters visits, or scrapping this app to help achieve tourism recovery in Niagara and throughout Canada?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, our government's focus has been the health and safety of Canadians. The most recent data indicates that the omicron wave has passed its peak, allowing us to move toward a longer-term approach to managing COVID.

As we have said since the beginning of the pandemic, Canada's border measures will remain flexible and adaptable, guided by science and prudence.

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HOUSING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the affordability crisis increasingly means that there are two kinds of families in Canada: families who own homes and families who never will. Gimmicks such as the first-time homebuyer incentive have failed to improve access to home ownership, while taxes, red tape and ridiculously long development timelines chase private capital out of construction, limit supply and lead to ever-increasing prices.

When will the minister admit that cheap gimmicks and talking points do not build houses?

• (1510)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. One of the key tools to making sure that there is more supply for Canadians is to actually invest in housing supply. That is exactly what the housing accelerator fund is about. We will invest \$4 billion in municipal governments to make sure that we invest in their systems so they can build more supply and they can build more supply faster.

We also banned foreign ownership of Canadian residential real estate for two years so we can free up more houses for Canadians to purchase. We are also putting together different programs to enable first-time homebuyers to access their dreams of home ownership. That is what federal leadership looks like. It is one thing to talk about doing something. It is another thing to actually get the job done.

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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, Canadian banks made record-breaking profits and paid out massive bonuses to their executives, but they then raised fees for Canadians already struggling to get by. Big banks are now shutting local branches in smaller communities all across the country, including CIBC branches in Pefferlaw and Brechin, the Scotiabank in Cannington, and many others. With these closures, rural residents, especially seniors, are left with no suitable options to do their banking.

Is this just another example of Liberals leaving rural Canadians behind in small towns?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here, on this side of the House, we take our responsibility

Oral Questions

seriously. That is why when we saw that our large banks were making record profits during the pandemic, we decided to propose a tax measure so as to ensure that banks would pay a one-time tax into the Canadian economy so that we can give that money back to Canadians in the form of reduced child care costs, in the form of reduced dental care costs and in the form of one-time payments for vulnerable Canadians. That is what we intend to do.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler, I have seen our main street businesses find new ways to stay open and battle throughout the pandemic. Our government has been there for small businesses.

Can the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario inform the House about what our government is doing for main street businesses across southern Ontario?

Hon. Helena Jaczek (Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler for her steadfast advocacy for small businesses in her community.

Our government recognizes the importance of keeping our main streets vibrant and supporting our small businesses. That is why we created the My Main Street program, which is providing over \$23 million in support for small businesses and communities across southern Ontario to help our amazing main streets and support our communities. We will continue to make investments that improve the lives of Canadians and help our communities and our economy.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, welcome back.

Establishing the Ojibway national urban park has been a decade in the making and is the work of Bill C-248. The City of Windsor and Caldwell first nation have written all members of Parliament, urging them to support this specific legislation. During yesterday's debate, all parties made their support known loud and clear, except for the Liberals, who are opposed. It is unbelievable.

The people of Windsor and Essex County are in favour of this. Indigenous communities are in favour of this. Environmentalists, unions and businesses are all in favour of Bill C-248. Why is the government attempting to create problems on a project that is good for climate change, the economy and tourism? It should unite Parliament, not tear it apart.

Points of Order

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member and all members that our government is committed to conserving and protecting Canada's biodiversity, wildlife and habitat in urban and more rural settings, and that Canada is home to extraordinary wildlife and natural landscapes. We know this is something Canadians care very deeply about. I am very happy to talk more with the hon. member about his particular initiative.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I met with Afghan refugees who have been stranded in Poland since August of 2021. These people put their trust in Canada to give them a safe haven. Poland has done all it can. These refugees will soon be penniless and homeless. Some analysts suggest that the Afghan refugee program has been de facto shut down and that Canada has abandoned them.

What does this failure tell the world about Canada's commitment to those who stood shoulder to shoulder with us? Their lives are not those of pawns. Will they be brought to Canada now, or will the minister admit that people were misled?

• (1515)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government remains very firm in our commitment to resettle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees. Despite all the challenges, there are now more than 14,500 Afghan refugees who have started their new life here in Canada. We continue to process applications for Afghan refugees day and night. We have mobilized our entire global network to process visas and issue them on an urgent basis. We will not stop until we achieve our goal of resettling at least 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan—

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all the time we have for questions today.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue on a point of order.

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HOCKEY CANADA

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House call Hockey Canada before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to shed light on its involvement in a case of alleged sexual assaults committed in 2018.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

*[English]***POINTS OF ORDER****ORAL QUESTIONS**

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like something to be clarified by the member from the Bloc Québécois on a question, during question period, with regards to organized crime. The Italian-Canadian community has been a pillar of Canada for over 100 years, and there are individuals, including myself, who would like those comments made by the hon. member to be clarified. If an apology has to be issued, I would wish the member to apologize to the Italian-Canadian community, with June being Italian Heritage Month and today being La Festa della Repubblica.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Would the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord like to respond to that allegation?

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I did not understand what my colleague said. Why does he want me to apologize?

The Speaker: Could the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge repeat his question?

[English]

Could the member be a little more concise and clarify, please?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I understand from the hon. member's question that he seeks clarification.

The hon. member mentioned the word “Mafia” and the words “Italian prosecutor” in the same sentence, linking the two as the Mafia being an Italian organization and organized crime as being only an Italian organization. Italians have suffered from this broad stereotyping for too many years, and I wish for an apology.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand my colleague's objection. I was quoting Italian prosecutor Roberto Scarpinato. I cannot say that this is about a German prosecutor because he is Italian. There is nothing bad in that. This prosecutor fought the Mafia his entire life, and that information can be found on Wikipedia. I do not understand what is so offensive about what I said. I simply reported the facts.

My wife, who passed away not so long ago, was Italian. I have the utmost respect for the Italian community. I feel at home in Italy and I love the Italian people. I did not mean to insult them. However, I certainly cannot say that Mr. Scarpinato, the prosecutor, is of any nationality other than Italian.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my point of order relates to Standing Order 16 and Standing Order 18, and we will, at some point today, be discussing them. However, it grieved me to see a whole class of kids, probably grades 3 and 4, from Oakville, Ontario, be subjected to the violations of those standing orders in a very raucous, rude, I suppose we would have to say on all sides, heckling and yelling back and forth.

I ask members to please, now that we are back in person in this place, consider the examples we set for school children who visit this place.

• (1520)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for her intervention. However I will remind hon. members of three things.

First, I received some concerns yesterday about something that was said, and sometimes it is not intentional, but members should try to think it through, even when heckling or shouting across. Even though we do not want members to heckle, members should try to think through how that will affect someone else's feelings.

Second, heckling is something we want to keep to a minimum in the chamber. However, although it was a little raucous, it was not so much the heckling as members talking among themselves, which is nice, because they are talking, but if they are talking while somebody else is trying to ask or answer a question, it makes it difficult for everyone else.

Third, please do not refer to anybody in the gallery. Members are not allowed to do that. It is not allowed in the Standing Orders.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report on COVID-19 rapid test procurement and distribution.

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

In light of your statement as you were referencing not referencing people in the gallery, I may have at that moment been waving to my six-year-old in the gallery, so I do apologize for waving to my son Matthew, who has joined us here today.

The Speaker: I want to remind the hon. members that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

On my point of order, I do seek clarification. As I understand the rules, it is completely forbidden for a member to say what only the Speaker has the right to say, such as “We recognize in the gallery so-and-so, the premier of such-and-such,” but I want clarification that when I reference the school group, I am not recognizing people in the gallery in any way that violates our rules, as I understand the rules.

If I am incorrect, I would like to know.

The Speaker: Once again, we are back to square one, talking about how members cannot do indirectly what they cannot directly, and referencing someone, as far as I can tell, is doing that.

I do not want to start having an argument here, but I think we will go to the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, and then if there is still an argument afterward, we will come back.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I just wanted to stand up and say I respect you as the Chair and expect you to maintain the rules of this place and to make rulings when people are out of line.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I merely want to understand the rules. I have read the rules, I know the rules and I am not challenging your ruling. I am asking for clarity. That is all.

The Speaker: That is a fair question. I will go back, review them and make sure I come back with an answer for the hon. member.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The House resumed from June 1 the consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:25, pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 31, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

[Translation]

Call in the members.

• (1535)

[English]

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

(Division No. 119)

YEAS

Members

Aboultayf	Aitchison
Albas	Aldag
Alghabra	Ali
Allison	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arya
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barron
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Benzen	Bergen
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bezan
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blair
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney	Block
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Bragdon	Brassard
Brière	Brock
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins
Cannings	Caputo

Routine Proceedings

Carr	Carrie	Martel	Martinez Ferrada
Casey	Chabot	Masse	Mathysen
Chagger	Chambers	May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Champagne	Champoux	Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
Chatel	Chen	McDonald (Avalon)	McGuinty
Chiang	Chong	McKay	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Collins (Victoria)	McLean	McLeod
Cooper	Cormier	McPherson	Mendès
Coteau	Dabrusin	Mendicino	Miao
Dalton	Damoff	Michaud	Miller
Dancho	Davidson	Moore	Morantz
Davies	DeBellefeuille	Morrice	Morrison
Deltell	d'Entremont	Morrissey	Motz
Desbiens	Desilets	Murray	Muys
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal	Naqvi	Nater
Dhillon	Diab	Ng	Noormohamed
Doherty	Dong	Normandin	O'Connell
Dowdall	Dreeshen	Oliphant	O'Regan
Drouin	Dubourg	O'Toole	Patzner
Duclos	Duguid	Paul-Hus	Perkins
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Dzerowicz	Ehsassi	Plamondon	Qualtrough
El-Khoury	Ellis	Rayes	Redekopp
Epp	Erskine-Smith	Reid	Rempel Garner
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)	Richards	Roberts
Fast	Fergus	Robillard	Rodriguez
Ferreri	Fillmore	Rogers	Romanado
Findlay	Fisher	Rood	Ruff
Fonseca	Fortier	Sahota	Sajjan
Fortin	Fragiskatos	Saks	Samson
Fraser	Fry	Sarai	Savard-Tremblay
Gaheer	Gallant	Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Garneau	Garon	Schmale	Serré
Garrison	Gaudreau	Sgro	Shanahan
Gazan	Généreux	Sheehan	Shields
Genuis	Gerretsen	Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Gill	Gladu	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Godin	Goodridge	Sinclair-Desgagné	Singh
Gould	Gourde	Small	Sorbara
Gray	Green	Soroka	Steinley
Hajdu	Hallan	Ste-Marie	Stewart
Hanley	Hardie	St-Onge	Strahl
Hepfner	Hoback	Stubbs	Sudds
Holland	Housefather	Tassi	Taylor Roy
Hughes	Hussen	Thériault	Therrien
Hutchings	Iacono	Thomas	Thompson
Idlout	Ien	Tochor	Tolmie
Jaczek	Jeneroux	Trudeau	Trudel
Johns	Joly	Turnbull	Uppal
Jones	Jowhari	Valdez	Van Bynen
Julian	Kayabaga	van Koeverden	Van Popta
Kelloway	Kelly	Vandal	Vandenbeld
Khalid	Khera	Vecchio	Vidal
Kitchen	Kmiec	Viersen	Vignola
Koutrakis	Kram	Villemure	Virani
Kramp-Neuman	Kurek	Vis	Vuong
Kusie	Kusmierczyk	Wagantall	Warkentin
Kwan	Lake	Waugh	Webber
Lalonde	Lambropoulos	Weiler	Wilkinson
Lametti	Lamoureux	Williams	Williamson
Lantsman	Lapointe	Yip	Zahid
Larouche	Lattanzio	Zarrillo	Zimmer
Lauzon	Lawrence	Zuberi— 323	
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier		
Lehoux	Lemire		
Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)		
Liepert	Lightbound		
Lloyd	Lobb	Nil	
Long	Longfield		
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)		
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacGregor		
MacKenzie	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Nil	
Maguire	Maloney		

NAYS

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me just start by saying, on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal opposition—

The Speaker: I want everyone to hear the question. Order, order.

The hon. opposition House leader, please.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, let me again start by saying, on behalf of Her Majesty's loyal opposition and our leader, the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar, just how happy we are to have you back in the seat. We are thankful for the great doctors in northern Ontario for looking after you so well.

Unfortunately, we did not have a House leaders' meeting on Tuesday, so that brings up the importance of today's Thursday question about the calendar for the next week. I wonder if the hon. government House leader could advise the House and all Canadians what the business of the House will be over the next week.

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me join my colleague opposite in welcoming you in your return to the role of Speaker. It is wonderful to see you there. I almost cannot see you because of the monument. I guess it is a homage to Fenway Park. It is our own green monster that has been constructed in this chamber. I can kind of see your head over it. It is wonderful to see you back in this place and in such fine form and good health. Welcome back.

Tomorrow morning, we will begin debate on Bill C-19, the budget legislation, which was reported back to the House from the finance committee yesterday. I want to take the opportunity to thank all members for their hard work on getting it back so quickly. Tomorrow afternoon, we will commence second reading debate of Bill C-21, the firearms legislation. Our priorities for next week will be report stage and third reading of the budget bill, and Bill C-5 regarding mandatory minimum sentences. Finally, I would like to inform the House that Tuesday, June 7 shall be an allotted day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE OF THE HOUSE AND ITS COMMITTEES

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this House take note of the Standing Orders and the procedure of the House and its committees.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 51(1), a motion that this House take note of the Standing Orders and the procedure of the House and its committees is now deemed to have been moved.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders will be extended by 11 minutes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that when I first came in this morning,

Government Orders

this is what I had anticipated talking about. Every election cycle, members are afforded the opportunity to express some of their thoughts on what would make this chamber more functional. Ultimately, from my perspective as a parliamentarian first and foremost, I am very interested in the rules of the chamber and what takes place in our standing committees. Even toward the tail end of the debate we had prior to question period, it was noticed that a couple of members were already starting to talk about standing order changes, and I was quite pleased.

A couple of the Conservative members talked about unanimous consent motions, and UC motions are a good place for me to start. What we have seen over the years is a growing attitude of acceptance in the sense that we bring something after question period and ask for unanimous consent. It was not that long ago, maybe a week or so, when I was provided a list of UC motion requests. There were five or six or seven UC motions that were going to be proposed. As a parliamentarian, I think it takes away from the process.

We have to appreciate that a number of members, for example, will have the good fortune of having their names drawn to bring forward resolutions, bills or motions during the hour for Private Members' Business. We will often see heritage day designations or other important issues brought forward by a particular member. In many ways, I think unanimous consent motions can undermine the importance of Private Members' Business. In many cases, UC motions will ultimately be used at the last minute or because something occurred that morning: possibly a member saw something on a news flash that is brought to the chamber, with the thinking that no one could vote against it, and a UC motion is brought forward.

For many members, it is somewhat of a disadvantage because they are not made aware of the content and no caucus discussions take place. When I have talked to members from different political entities in the chamber, there seems to be a general feeling that we need to change that standing order to better reflect what would be acceptable. I appreciated the statements earlier. The question that I had for members and that we have seen in recent weeks is to give a clear indication, whether that rule ultimately changes or not, to elevate or amplify the important role that speakers have with respect to unanimous consent motions.

They have the authority to look at what is being proposed. In essence, if there is a feeling that it is not going to happen, that it is a last-minute thing or there have not been any real consultations, they can refer it back to the House indirectly or directly as opposed to entertaining the motion. I really believe it is one of the things that takes away from the individual member. Individual members have a responsibility to have at least a basic understanding of what is being asked of them. How can they have that understanding if it is brought up at the end of question period and they are expected to be quiet on it?

Government Orders

I say that knowing that many members feel the same way I do on the issue. I see a thumbs-up and I appreciate that. When I think of rule changes and standing orders, I know a number of members who will follow me will share a personal feeling or thought in terms of how a rule could be changed that would be to the betterment of the chamber.

● (1540)

I would really encourage members, not as a partisan but as someone who cares about how this chamber functions and how we can improve upon our rules. One of the things, for example, that I have always been an advocate for is the idea of a dual chamber, but my attitudes toward a dual chamber somewhat changed when I heard other members ask if we really wanted to have a second chamber. There is a main chamber and then a secondary chamber. All the good stuff happens in the main chamber and the other stuff happens in the new chamber: the other stuff as opposed to bad stuff.

The point is that we would have a secondary chamber. Another idea came out of it. The idea was instead of having a dual chamber, why not designate Friday as a debate day? In that, members could take any item that they wanted that was in second reading, whether it was a private member's bill or a government piece of legislation, and notify the Speaker on the Wednesday prior to say they would like to speak to such-and-such a bill. That initiates Friday as being a debate day. There would be no need to have a dual chamber. There is only one chamber.

We can talk about major changes to rules such as that, or we can talk about what I believe is a fairly straightforward rule change. How many inside this chamber would oppose the House looking at dress codes? I, for one, believe that a member should be able to wear anything he or she wants when making a member's statement, S. O. 31. If I want to come all dressed up in my Winnipeg Jets or my favourite football team uniform, without a jacket and without a tie, and be boastful so I can clip it and post it on Facebook as a big fan of my home team, I want to be able to do that. Some members are able to do that, but males cannot do that. There are some inequities within our dress code. Having it modernized or updated would be good. The real judges are the constituents we represent. I would like to think the prestige of the chamber would dictate that people would dress appropriately. That is one of the rules that is fairly widely accepted.

Then we might have some Standing Order rules that are pretty much straightforward. Every day I stand and say, "Madam Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand". If I do not get to reporting my questions in time, because of let us say a concurrence motion or some sort of delay, then a minister will have to stand. What about if it were closer to the top of the Order Paper, like tabling of documents? It is a pretty straightforward request. It does not take anything away from government or opposition. It just allows for something to get done.

As to the idea of the Prime Minister's question period, I think there is a great deal of merit in it. Whether it is the Prime Minister or a premier, when I was sitting for many years in opposition, it was nice to know that there was a day designated when there was an opportunity we members were afforded. Today, I am in govern-

ment. Who knows where I will be 10 years from now? I might not even be a parliamentarian.

There is something to be said about asking a question directly to the premier or directly to the Prime Minister. I make reference to premiers because when I was in the Manitoba Legislature, when we did a major overhaul, we looked at what Ottawa was doing. Ottawa has an important role that goes beyond the rules of this chamber. I know that first-hand: Provinces will look at it. Maybe in a question, I will give a specific example of that. We have an important role, and hopefully we will be able to take advantage of it.

● (1545)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to perhaps suggest this to the member in talking about Private Members' Business. It is unfortunate that some members who have served in this House for perhaps a decade never get an opportunity to table a private member's bill and take it through the entire process. I will bring up the experience of the former interim leader of the Conservative Party, former minister Rona Ambrose, who was able to have her private member's bill passed by this House only at the very end of the last 18 months in her term.

I wonder if the member will consider this idea. Would he approve of having twice the number of hours devoted to Private Members' Business and of changing Private Members' Business so that it is dealt with in the same manner as Government Orders, which means that a member will make a speech and then have a question-and-comment period every single time?

It has happened in the past that deputy chairs while they are in the chair confuse what is going on, sometimes because the hours change very quickly. It would be a consistent way of always dealing with it. Right now, Private Members' Business is kind of dealt with as a very long 10-minute S. O. 31.

● (1550)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think the member has raised an excellent point. The whole concept of debate on Fridays or of having Friday as a debate day would mean that I could choose any bill, whether government or Private Members' Business, and I could say to the Speaker on the Wednesday, "I would like to talk about private member's bill XYZ." Then I can stand up in the same process, either with the 10-minute speech or the five-minute question-and-answer period.

The real issue for me, more than anything else, if I could leave a lasting impression, is that we have gone through this on a number of occasions, yet we have never really seen the rule change. What does it take for us to actually change the rules of the House of Commons?

I want to keep a very open mind to this. I do not approach it from a government perspective; I want us to treat it from a parliamentarian perspective—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to give opportunities for other questions.

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[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think we have a number of rules to review today. I would like to ask my colleague from Winnipeg North about prorogation, a topic we have often talked about together, and about this amendment that could help prevent this tool from being misused.

The 2020 prorogation had huge consequences. Some committees, which had been urgently recalled in the middle of a pandemic, were studying reports that ended up being wiped from the agenda when Parliament was prorogued. I experienced this at the Standing Committee on Status of Women. Petitions can also get lost, since the slate is wiped clean.

Does my colleague think it is important to limit prorogation powers and to prevent governments, in particular minority ones, from abusing this power?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think the most important thing I can see is that, as I indicated before, I am approaching this whole idea of changes to standing rules as a parliamentarian, first and foremost, as someone who has been in opposition for over 20 years and now as a member of the government.

For me personally, I would like to say that everything is on the table. The idea is that we need to be able to come up with thoughts and ideas that will modernize our rules so that we can actually share them with other jurisdictions. I cannot emphasize how much potential Canada has, not only within our provinces but, I would suggest, around the world in terms of the leadership role that we can play in ensuring a better and healthier democracy. That is why I am committed to doing it, not as a Liberal member of Parliament but as a parliamentarian, first and foremost.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think it is incredibly important to always have these opportunities to talk about the Standing Orders, because they are the rules on how we guide ourselves in this place and how we are transparent in the process to Canadians.

In my riding, I have definitely heard from a lot of Canadians who are feeling a lot of cynicism about our democratic process. They see these discussions and they do not feel it is meaningful debate.

I am just wondering if the member could reflect on something I have reflected on. At the beginning of COVID, of course, we had a basic question period time in which a member had five minutes to have that debate back and forth. I found that under that system, there was actually meaningful discussion between the questioner and the minister. I am wondering if that is something we should explore instead of continuing with of the current process of question period, which is very adversarial.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think that idea has a great deal of merit. I witnessed it first-hand, as all of us did. It proved to be fairly effective. The key thing there was a quick five-minute question that would entail, let us say, a two-minute answer.

There are some things that we have to try to overcome, but absolutely, it has merit. The issue for me is, quite simply, how do we

make it happen? We can talk about it, but we have to somehow try to make these changes happen.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, as part of the debate on the Standing Orders, which takes place once in every Parliament pursuant to Standing Order 51(1), I will today be making a suggestion as to how to address the growing misuse of unanimous consent motions, or, more accurately, the growing number of disingenuous requests to seek the unanimous consent of the House by members who know that no such assent will actually be happening.

I will give an outline of the problem momentarily, but first I want to state that it is my view that the solution to the problem lies not in changing the Standing Orders but rather in the Speaker taking the initiative to determine more precisely what the will of the House is with regard to any particular request for unanimous consent prior to, rather than after, permitting the member who is requesting the consent to present to the House the content of the motion for which unanimous consent is being sought.

Let me start with a caveat. The process of seeking and frequently of granting the unanimous consent of all members is an important mechanism that is applied quite literally on a daily basis, and sometimes hourly, in order to bypass the time-consuming formalities of debate and voting on matters when we are all in agreement.

To select a few examples from a very long list of useful applications, unanimous consent is a useful tool in such things as allowing a member to request a correction to Hansard; allowing the House to see the clock, as we like to say, at a later time than it truly is in order to advance the time at which we can adjourn for the evening; making changes to the membership of the procedure and House affairs committee, for which the consent of the House is required; and concurring in committee reports when these are supported by a broad consensus.

The seeking and granting of unanimous consent is also beneficial when one member believes there may be universal consent to a substantive or policy-related motion and, before rising in the House, has first sought out behind the scenes the support of the House leaders of the various parties, and only then presents the agreed-to motion in the House. When prior consent has been sought, the reading of the motion in the House is a final step confirming that the motion has the support of every single MP then in attendance, including every independent MP and also any MPs who might on that occasion be choosing to act independently of their own party's House leader.

Much good can be done via policy-oriented motions that are approved in such a manner. I am, for example, particularly proud of the motion that I proposed, which was, following behind-the-scenes negotiations, adopted by unanimous consent on October 24, 2002. This motion, which called on the prime minister to request the release by China of a dozen Falun Gong practitioners, enabled Jean Chrétien to make this request more effectively than he could have done, and in the end, all of the prisoners were eventually released and came to Canada, where they have been model citizens.

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Now let me turn to the misuse of requests for unanimous consent. Members will frequently rise in this place, particularly in the hour just after question period, when the media are most likely to be present in the gallery, and will request the unanimous consent of the House for motions that have not been consented to in advance by the House leaders of the recognized parties. Sometimes this has happened after a failed attempt to win this support and sometimes it happens when no meaningful attempt at all has been made at consultation, and certainly with too little time for the House leaders to consult with the members of the caucuses on whose behalf they speak.

Here is how this works. A member will rise and typically, although not universally, give a preamble that without quite passing the point at which the member would be regarded as misleading the House—which is of course a severe offence, with real consequences—gives the false impression that the right kind of consultation has taken place. The preamble typically goes like this: “Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.”

Because the Speaker cannot be sure that the member is stretching the truth, the whole House therefore is compelled to listen to the member giving a policy statement at a time when other business was scheduled for discussion. As the text of the motion becomes clear to the whole House, other members will sometimes call out their opposition to the motion, and only at that point is the Speaker empowered to interrupt and silence the MP who moved the motion.

The various chair occupants are clearly frustrated by this. Here is what the Deputy Speaker said two weeks ago on May 16. As some members called out “no”, the Deputy Speaker rose and said, “I am already hearing some nays”, and there was no consent. Then later the Deputy Speaker added:

I want to make one comment on this....

Unanimous consent motions are being abused in the House of Commons. ... I urge each and every member of the House of Commons to use Statements by Members to get their points across rather than using unanimous consent motions as they are being used today.

• (1555)

If the Speaker was frustrated on that day, I can only imagine what he must have felt on May 3, when, starting at 3:15 in the afternoon, a series of 11 requests for unanimous consent were presented and rejected by various MPs, which wasted a considerable amount of time. Finally, on that day, the Deputy Speaker rose and expressed his frustration at the fact that prior consent was being implied when none had actually been achieved and encouraged the respective House leaders to discuss the subject at their weekly in camera meeting later that afternoon.

Based on what we have seen since May 3, it seems safe to assume that the House leaders have not been able to resolve the matter internally, so now let me suggest a solution that could be implemented unilaterally by the Speaker, a solution that would augment the Speaker’s ability to carry out his or her vital role of serving as the most immediate or proximate vehicle by which the House can express its will.

It would work like this. Number one, a member rises and begins the usual formulaic statement of “Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.”

Number two, rather than allowing the member to proceed further, the Speaker would at this point interrupt and say, “Is it the case that the hon. member has gained the consent of the House leaders of all recognized parties to the exact wording that the member is about to propose?”

Number three, at that point, any member who has actually won this support could truthfully say yes and simply carry on, as at present. However, number four, any member who has not yet won the support of all House leaders would need to say no, at which point the Speaker would state, “In that case, I encourage the member to seek the consent and to return to the House when the support of the House leaders has been achieved.” The Speaker would then simply move on to other business.

Number five, of course, is that in theory the member could lie and claim the consent of the House leaders had been achieved, but this would be an unambiguous attempt to mislead the House, and the penalties for so doing are so severe and so immediate that no sane member would attempt this tactic. Even an insane member would do it only once.

Members could also, I suppose, attempt to dodge the Speaker’s question by waffling and not quite saying yes or no, but this too will fail as long as the Speaker stops them sooner or later by stating, “It is not the practice in this House for requests for unanimous consent on substantive motions to proceed unless the mover first clearly states that he or she has received the prior consent of the House leaders of all recognized parties.”

The key point here is to prevent the member from reading out the substance of the motion unless the member has truthfully stated that the triggering condition has been met.

Once it is clear that the ability to read out an out-of-order policy statement has been lost, I predict two things will happen. One is that most such attempts will simply stop. The second is that in order to avoid being interrupted by the inevitable question from the Speaker, members who actually do have the required level of support from the House leaders will learn to say something along these lines: “Madam Speaker, I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House to the following motion, which has been agreed to, in the following words, and in both official languages, by the House leaders of all recognized parties”, or something like that.

Let me now state an important caveat. For this process to work, and also to not hinder the appropriate use of motions to seek unanimous consent, it would need to remain possible for any member to continue to rise, as at present, to seek the unanimous consent of the House on a purely procedural matter, such as seeing the clock, correcting a factual error in Hansard and so on. Such interventions are easily distinguished from attempts to gain the consent of the House to a policy statement, so there is no need to make any change to how the Speaker responds when a procedural matter is raised by a member. It is also impossible, in practice, to start by pretending to raise a procedural matter and then switch over to a request for unanimous consent on a motion regarding a substantive policy issue without triggering the formula I proposed.

I look forward to answering questions on this proposal.

• (1600)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to ask our colleague across the way his thoughts on some of the comments that were shared earlier in regard to increasing the amount of debate, whether it be in the way of a dual chamber or of having Fridays as debate days, to ensure more members can share the diversity of the perspectives of their constituents, considering this is the House of Commons. I would love to hear his thoughts on that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I do think more debate is helpful. The great struggle we have here is between the desire to have fuller debates with more potential for meaningful exchange and the fact that this takes time. We are constantly time-starved here.

There are a number of different possibilities. I am not sure I want to recommend one or even suggest that only one is the right thing. The issue of a dual chamber, a second debating chamber, as they have in the U.K. and Australia, might make sense if the House thinks so, but let us say we went down that avenue. I would still say that having longer sitting hours is a reasonable thing to consider.

One thing that the member did not suggest but that I think is reasonable is sitting more weeks a year. We sit 26 weeks a year. There are 52 weeks in a year, which means that there are 26 additional weeks. If we look back at our history, we will see that we regularly sat in the summer, and as recently as the first year of the pandemic, we did so again. It is not the end of the world, especially now that hybrid sittings exist. This is another option that could add something substantial, and it is probably the easiest of the various options to fit into the system we now have.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really liked my colleague's last point about requests for unanimous consent.

Would it not be less complicated to simply tell the Chair, "I hope to get unanimous consent for the following motion", and then proceed with the motion?

Mr. Scott Reid: I do not think so, Madam Speaker. The difference between our proposals is that mine would give the Speaker the power to stop the member before they share an opinion and move a motion. If the proposed motion does not have the consent of the

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House leaders, it will have no chance of being unanimously adopted in the House.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I so enjoy my hon. colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. He is a true champion of democracy in this place.

To look further at this question of unanimous consent motions, which are not just used to waste time in this place, I find they have been constructed carefully by some parties, and then immediately there is a set of emails asking for funds to be donated because these awful people in Parliament refuse to accept this wonderful unanimous consent motion.

I want to ask the member to consider the role of an MP such as me in a party that is not one of the recognized parties. It is unanimous consent and we have the right to say no. Some parties in this place fail to ask ahead of time, and then I am forced to say that I did not even hear what it was and that I cannot agree to it unless I see it.

Another unanimous consent situation, which is now regularly denied, is with regard to routine tributes and non-controversial matters. As the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, and on behalf of the Green Party, I ask for, and for 11 years got, unanimous consent to speak to things like the death of my friend Alexa McDonough, and then I am denied. I have not been allowed unanimous consent once since the last election to speak in this place on the ritualized, non-controversial issues.

How would the member propose to handle those?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, first of all, I did not know that the hon. member was denied the ability to speak on the passing of Alexa McDonough. That is a real shame, in and of itself. Alexa McDonough was a great Canadian.

I think the answer to this would be something like this. On the issue of what constitutes a recognized party, the number is settled at 12. I know that my colleague would say it should be set at a different level, and that is a reasonable item to discuss.

I think the idea of simply trying to deal with things behind the scenes in advance makes sense. Then we do not waste the House's time. We also do not facilitate the production of a motion that is intended to fail, for fundraising purposes. However, I have to tell members that the mysteries of online fundraising and how to resolve the issues involved with that are well beyond my pay grade, rest assured.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, wherever life has led me, there have been times when we have had to get together to discuss approaches, rules, things we wanted to change about the operations of an organization or business. It is healthy to do so. However, there are certain phrases I have heard and had difficulty understanding, with the most frequent being the excuse that “it has always been done this way”.

If this had been the standard response of human beings over the course of millennia, we would still be living in caves and wearing animal skins, if anything at all. Asking questions about how things are working, looking for potential improvements, suggesting improvements and implementing them are stages in a healthy process. I am therefore pleased that Standing Order 51 lets the House start that process. I used the word “start” quite deliberately. I will come back to that in the third part of my speech.

During the Bloc Québécois's opposition day on May 10, several members of the House criticized us for using an opposition day to discuss the prayer. Some of them said it was frivolous. However, when a subject provokes heated debate in the House, it signals that this subject is important to the members. How can a subject that is so important to people be considered frivolous? I wonder about that.

These same individuals suggested that we bring up the matter of the prayer on the day dedicated to discussing Standing Order 51. That is what I am doing. My first suggestion is to amend Standing Orders 30(1) and 30(2) in chapter IV. My suggestion for Standing Order 30(1) is that the Speaker set aside a moment of silence for personal reflection, respecting each member's beliefs, every day at the meeting of the House before any business is entered upon. Since Standing Order 30(2) provides that the business of the House shall commence after the prayer, it would instead say that it shall commence after a moment of reflection.

This is a minor change. Each member will be able to follow their conscience, beliefs and faith. I am talking about respecting everyone present by not imposing a prayer that may not be consistent with their faith or convictions. It is also a way of demonstrating to the public that, regardless of one's faith and beliefs, the House and its representatives work for everyone, not just those who feel comfortable with a particular religion. As it stands now, the prayer clearly refers to a Christian God and suggests Anglicanism in particular.

During this moment of reflection, members may speak silently to whichever god or spiritual leader they wish, or to themselves, for that matter. Do the concepts of omnipotence and omniscience shared by many religions not imply that expressions of faith can be heard even if they are not spoken aloud?

The second item I would like to draw to my colleagues' attention is Standing Order 32(7). This section concerns the tabling of a document outlining the reasons for a prorogation. The problem with this section is that the government has to explain the prorogation after it has been applied, no more than 20 sitting days after the return of the House. In my opinion, that makes no sense and it encourages political abuse. It is political abuse to use prorogation when debates are getting longer and the government is in hot water

over certain issues. The government has a responsibility to find common ground with the other parties and reach a consensus that represents the will of all Canadians, not just the ideologies of a single party.

Has anyone ever calculated the costs associated with prorogation? What is the cost of the bills that die on the Order Paper?

It is enormous. Taxpayers have to pay for that. Important bills often get delayed year after year, election after election, prorogation after prorogation. If we could avoid the delays caused by prorogation, that would be a big step forward.

● (1610)

How many hours did we spend in the House and in committee debating issues like WE Charity and COVID-19 spending? Prorogation killed off all those debates. As a result, despite the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars spent on salaries for MPs, technicians, interpreters, clerks, officials and others, we did not get an answer or any follow-up on these issues.

I propose that at least three days, although the exact number of days can be determined later, before the prorogation of the House is announced, a minister of the Crown be required to table a document listing the reasons for the prorogation, explaining those reasons and demonstrating the efforts made by the government to avoid prorogation, and that no more than five hours of debate be allotted for discussing said document.

My last suggestion is about Standing Order 51 itself. I would like to make this suggestion because, as I said in my introduction, Standing Order 51 gives us an opportunity to come together to reflect and discuss changes and improvements we would like to see to the Standing Orders.

As it stands, I see a flaw. We spend a whole day or thereabouts discussing something, but we do not really get any feedback on the decisions made by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the suggestions we make. In short, we get excited about the possibility of improving the procedures and making them more efficient. We prepare speeches to express our thoughts so that they are well understood by our colleagues, but there is no feedback on our suggestions.

This aspect of the process makes no sense. Ask any worker, in any environment, what frustrates them most about their workplace, and they may very well say that it is when they make a suggestion that goes unheeded or when they are turned away without any explanation. They are told no, because that is the way it is, that is the way it has always been done, and that is the way it will stay. It is frustrating.

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That is exactly what is happening in the House with our proposals for Standing Order 51. That is why, in my introduction, I referred to a process being started, but not completed. We start the process without finishing it, without concluding it, without closing the loop. Discussions on the Standing Orders are essential for improving and advancing the practices of the House and its committees, but they are very expensive. If we just add up the annual salaries of the 20 or so members who will be speaking or asking questions, the total comes to over \$700,000. That figure does not include the salaries of the clerks and all the staff, such as the interpreters and information technicians, or the pay that members get for any additional responsibilities they may have.

If we do not get any feedback on our suggestions, how can the costs of this critical debate on the procedures be justified?

Here is my suggestion. A fourth section should be added as follows: not more than 45 sitting days after the day designated for the House to take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs shall report to the House the decisions made, including justifications as to the suggestions made by members on said designated day.

Let us ensure our actions are meaningful, logical and effective. That is why I am proposing this amendment.

I would like to conclude my speech with this thought. Opposition for opposition's sake is pointless. Parliamentary obstruction is rarely justified. These two practices are costly and a real waste of time, money and talent, the talents and skills of everyone in the House and in committee.

The opposition's role is not to oppose for the sake of opposing but to make constructive suggestions that ensure tax dollars are used wisely. That is where I am coming from with today's proposals, and I hope that everyone will take them into consideration and that we can all see the results of this consultation.

• (1615)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Beauport—Limoilou offered lots of suggestions for changes to the Standing Orders that could be codified in the House. I think we should not be too quick to change the rules of the House. It is very difficult to go back to a previous version that may have been better. Sometimes people try to change things without knowing for sure that it will make the work of the House easier.

I would like to ask my colleague what she thinks of making it so that any change to the Standing Orders must be done by unanimous consent of the members of Parliament, because these are the ground rules that all members and all parties will have to live with.

• (1620)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, members must know that every suggestion we make today will or should be considered by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I am counting on that committee to make responsible decisions and consider each of these proposals carefully. Unanimous consent at committee would be appropriate, in my humble opinion.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the suggestions being made. Part of my concern is that, and I have sat on PROC before and have gone through this process, at times it can be somewhat discouraging. It tends to always want to go for the low fruit and so forth, yet there seems to be a strong desire from members of all sides of the House to try to see rules actually pass.

I would like to get the member's thoughts with respect to this. If we were to pass a rule or make major changes to the Standing Orders, would she agree with the principle of a sunset clause, or if they were to take effect after the next election? Does she see any way in which we can ease the minds of members with respect to how we could ultimately implement significant rule changes?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, do we have to wait until the next election or would it be better if these changes happened sooner? If the changes will make the House work better and possibly save money, why not implement them as soon as possible? That is what I think, and there is also a question of efficiency. This will also have an impact on the taxes paid by taxpayers, whom we represent.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to first acknowledge that I agree with the efforts to re-evaluate the morning prayer and instead replace it with a moment of silence. I voted in favour of that motion, and I agree that we need to make that space safe and available for everybody in whatever way they would like to use it.

[Translation]

I want to ask my colleague this question in French. Emergency and take note debates are important tools. Should there be a permanent mechanism to make it easier for members to request them?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, sometimes there are debates that need to be held urgently when we hear in the news or in some other way of a problem that needs to be resolved quickly. Is the procedure too difficult or too long? I think that is an excellent question.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, when it is time to change something, the worst thing we can say, even us as parliamentarians, is that it has always worked that way and has worked well. We have to keep questioning our own practices and ways of thinking in order to improve them.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou.

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I would just like to ask her if she is aware of the suggestions made by Hugo Cyr, a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal's department of legal sciences, on the issues of prorogation.

He made the suggestion, which I support, of holding a mandatory vote in the House of Commons before a Prime Minister requests a prorogation.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of that proposal, but I find it very interesting. The Prime Minister and the government represent not just their party, but also all the options that are presented in their ridings and in ours. The proposal is interesting and should be considered.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to start by recognizing what a privilege it is to serve as a member of Parliament in this place. It is an honour I have had since 2015. To the constituents of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford who are watching today's debate, I know it can seem a lot like inside baseball. We are talking about the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. It is not always the most riveting of subject material, but I will say to them is that this debate is important because the Standing Orders allow us as their elected representations to do our job effectively.

I want to approach today's debate from the perspective as a member of the opposition, because I think that for members on this side of the House, the Standing Orders sometimes take on supreme importance, especially in the context of a majority government, as I experienced during my first four years here, but also in the context of a minority Parliament. It is what gives us a structure, some semblance of reliability on what our day would be like and the tools that we could use to try to push different agendas.

I think many members would agree with me that in this place time is our most valuable currency, and once it is spent, we do not get it back. Essentially, a lot of the House's business is the management of time. There is a constant battle between the government's priorities and what the opposition wants, and sometimes that can lead to some pretty epic clashes. I have been witness to that over the years.

I can remember my first experience coming into the original House of Commons chamber in Centre Block in December 2015. I had just had my orientation session, and I was walking down the hallway on a lunch break. The security guard saw me wandering around aimlessly. She asked if I wanted to go inside the chamber, and I asked if I could. She said, "Yes, you are a member of Parliament. Just tell me when you are finished, and I will lock the door."

My very first experience of not being in the gallery, but actually being in the chamber, in Centre Block, was to have that entire chamber to myself, to just sort of feel the weight of history. One could almost re-enact the famous debates that had happened in that place, the great moments of Canadian democracy.

Then, of course, I received my gigantic green book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. A lot of my parliamentary colleagues would acknowledge that I am a little bit of a geek on procedure and practice. I have not had as much time as I would have

liked in recent days to devote to that because my critic duties are keeping me quite busy, but I have always been interested in the mechanics of how this place works. I want to take this opportunity to both draw on the experience that I have had over the last six and a half years to maybe suggest ways that the procedure and House affairs committee could maybe take some of the substance of today's debate and make some improvements to how we operate in this place.

I just want to start off with a nice quote from the great Stanley Knowles, when he gave a speech to the Empire Club in 1957. He said:

It is the opposition's right to insist at all times on the full protection of the rules of debate. The government is entitled to that same protection, but in addition it has its majority with which to establish its will. The opposition has only the rules for its protection, hence the authorities on parliamentary procedure emphasize the greater importance to the opposition of the only protection it has, the protection of the rules.

That sets the context of why, from this side of the House, this debate probably takes on a little more importance, especially when we do have those majority governments. Speaking on the time as a currency aspect, we all have great ideas for legislation. The government absolutely does monopolize most of the time with Government Orders, but we have had some tremendously good ideas coming not only from members of the back bench on the government side but also from the opposition side in the form of Private Members' Business.

It is to our great loss that we do not spend more time discussing Private Members' Business. One thing I think the procedure and House affairs committee should take a look at is trying to carve out more time in a sitting week to debate Private Members' Business so we can get a full spectrum of ideas, get them their airing, and really encourage those ideas to come forward and have that substantive debate.

• (1630)

In the 42nd Parliament, I drew position 159, so it took me four years just to get to the first hour of debate. I was substantially more lucky in the 43rd Parliament being in the top 30, and I think in this one I am in position No. 94. It is all luck of the draw, but if we had more time each week, more members would have that opportunity to put forward their ideas.

I have heard in previous speeches the need for more importance to be attached to PMBs for when they go to the other place, and I know we do not have control over the rules of the Senate, but at the end of the 42nd Parliament we did see a lot of very good private member's bills from the House unnecessarily held up. I think that was shameful to the democratic process.

I would also like to see giving members of Parliament the opportunity to launch take-note debates based on their petitions. We know that petitioning the Crown is one of the oldest practices in our system of Parliament. In fact, if we go back to the days of the 13th century monarch Edward I, this was a way for the commoners to petition the Crown their grievances, and the substance is still very much the same. We as members have the opportunity to stand in this place, make a short introduction on the nature of the petition and what people are asking for, but it would be great, after we get a government response to that petition, because sometimes they are quite unsatisfactory responses, to have the opportunity to pursue the government's response in a more fulsome way and make sure that we can debate it.

With question period, I often joke with my constituents that question period is an hour of my life I will never get back each day I am here. It is a fact. The 35 seconds we have to pose a question and the 35 seconds the government has to answer does not lend itself to credible debate in this place. We had a unique time in the early days of the pandemic in 2020 when we had the COVID-19 committee of which all members of the House were members with basically a super committee of the whole, and we set up a system like at committee, where members could have five minutes with a minister of their choice. If our question was not actually answered by the minister, they could not just go back to the same old rote talking points or they would look quite foolish. It actually forced both minister and questioner to have a fulsome debate, to have backup questions and to stick on point.

I know we might have to figure out how the timing works out in the five minutes, but the rules are in committee of the whole are basically that the minister gets approximately the same amount of time as the questioner used to pose the question. We could adopt the same rules there. I know that question period is when most Canadians tune in, but I always tell my constituents please, please do not judge our work based on that one hour alone. I know the rest of the work that we do is not as interesting, it does not have the same kind of fireworks, but is far more substantive, and there is a real opportunity for reform.

On the other side, we do have the ability during adjournment proceedings debate to follow up on questions where we felt the answer was not satisfactory, so either we reform question period to give a little more exchange or we give more time to adjournment proceedings so we are not limited to just three per day. I know time is a valuable thing in this place, but we could find opportunities to schedule that.

I will end on this: We need to have a serious conversation about how we make this place more family friendly. We have found through the pandemic that we can operate in a hybrid fashion. Speaking for myself, I do enjoy being back here in person. I love seeing my colleagues in person, but I also want to recognize that we are trying to encourage more people from different backgrounds to come to elected politics. The way to do that is to make it more family friendly.

We need to show young women and young men, those with families, those with different life circumstances, that they can come here and serve, whether it is in person or online. That is a healthy

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thing for our democracy, to try to make sure that we build a legislature that is reflective of what Canadian society looks like.

• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can understand why we look at question period, but I will just raise a quick point, and that is on the suggestion of five minutes. We would probably get 10 questions versus 40 questions, and the demand for the number of questions is quite high. I think maybe it is the adjournment proceedings that we could possibly further explore, or other ways in which we could do it.

Interestingly enough, in Manitoba we actually copied the idea of the shorter questions and answers from here in Ottawa, because we had five minutes. I think it was kind of unlimited. We would get a question that would go four or five minutes long and then the answer would be four or five minutes long, and people would say that question period had already come to an end but only a few people had asked questions, so it was that trade-off. I like the adjournment motion.

I have a question to the member in regard to this. I raised an idea. If the member had a choice and wanted to increase debate, would the member choose, and he can think about it, to go from 8 o'clock in the morning until whatever time, like 8 o'clock in the evening, on a Friday? All I would have to do is notify the Speaker on a Wednesday that I want to speak on private member's bill x or I want to speak on a government bill. As long as it is at second reading or even possibly third reading, then we would have a full day in which we could speak to the bills and the legislation that we want for a full 10-minute speech with five-minute answers.

I ask, just to get the member's thoughts on that, versus having a dual chamber.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, absolutely, I am open to all ideas on this. As we all know, on Fridays we sit from 10 until 2:30. For people like me, their riding is about as far away from Ottawa as we can get, so that is valuable time for me to be able to get back to my riding and spend time with my family and my constituents.

However, there are Fridays when I am staying here in Ottawa, and if I was able to give a signal to the Chair and other members of this place that I wanted to debate a certain private member's bill, we could find a way to schedule that, and we could probably make up the time past 2:30 to maybe schedule two, three or four private members' bills.

For any opportunity, I am flexible, just as long as we agree on the premise that more Private Members' Business does need to find time to have debate in this place.

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Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I like the member's idea on adjournment proceedings, but I think it should be moved to earlier in the day. It should actually follow question period and it should be shorter. Perhaps the system could be either a random draw done by the Speaker right away through the clerks, or a first-come, first-served system. Whatever it is, could the member comment on that part?

It would be like a continuation of question period, perhaps, just in a longer format. That way, members do not have to stay until the very end of the night and parliamentary secretaries would not have to spend the entire day hoping for the member to show up.

The second part is about making this place a family-friendly environment. I wonder if the member could comment on pairing, because I know everybody seems to sometimes like the voting app, until it does not work in someone's case because he has grown out facial hair and the app does not recognize him, and then he has to call in just to make sure his vote is counted.

That is more of a problem for the men in this place. There is a specific one I am thinking of who continuously has problems with the voting app because he has let his beard grow out, but we already have a tool that has existed for hundreds of years and that was used extensively during World War II to ensure members would be able to vote. Since 1992, it has been connected to the whips. There is a binder on the desk for the table officers where a member can pair their vote and it is signed off on by the whip.

Could the member perhaps speak to that use of pairing, instead of continuing with the voting app?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, on the first part, I will share a rare moment of sympathy for parliamentary secretaries who have to stay, because we know that, especially at this time of year in June, otherwise known as “silly season”, sometimes the House is sitting until midnight, so parliamentary secretaries have to be there and ready, possibly, to stay until 12:30.

On his question, I like his ideas about adjournment proceedings. If we could find a way to schedule it after QP, that would be great. We are all here during the middle of the day.

On the voting question, I am not sure if I am going to land on one side or the other, but as long as we agree to the premise that we are going to try to make this a more family-friendly and inclusive environment, I am open to a more in-depth discussion at the procedure and House affairs committee on what that would look like.

I think we should approach that debate with an understanding that we need to find a way to get more people to participate, because right now I think they look at what the House of Commons schedule is like, and they just do not see how they could manage that with their family responsibilities. That is something I think we, hopefully, can all agree needs to change in this country.

• (1640)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; the hon. member for Kitchener Centre,

Seniors; the hon. member for North Okanagan—Shuswap, Taxation.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, given what we have seen today, we may need a new standing order addition to Standing Order 51 to say that a minimum amount of debate is needed so we all have a chance to contribute to a discussion on standing orders when another more important issue intervenes, as some party takes the time of the House on something else. That is a new thought because we really only have this one chance in every parliamentary session to talk about our Standing Orders, and they are so important. I am limited to 10 minutes, but I could easily talk on this matter for some considerably longer time.

I want to start with some ideas that came to us on the parliamentary Special Committee on Electoral Reform. We had some of the country's best and most thoughtful political scientists speak to us, and I am going to take some presentations that are not on the matter of our voting system, although clearly parliamentary democracy would be improved if we had a more co-operative consensus-based approach, such as occurred in New Zealand when it got rid of first past the post and moved to mixed member proportional. I know from colleagues who are members of Parliament in New Zealand that consensus and co-operation became much more the rule of the day, with much less hyperpartisanship, and Parliament works better.

I want to point to some recommendations that came from professor Hugo Cyr with the Université du Québec à Montréal and professor emeritus Peter Russell from the University of Toronto. One was from Professor Cyr. It may strike people as an unnecessary change to our standing orders, but it is important. We are a parliamentary democracy in the Westminster tradition, which means we do not elect a prime minister. A lot of people get confused on this point, including some people running to lead another party.

It is important to think about Professor Cyr's recommendation, which is that after an election, between electing the Speaker and the Speech from the Throne, this Parliament would elect the prime minister, because all of us elected to this place are, in theory, equal. The prime minister is first among equals. It is a foregone conclusion who becomes prime minister once the seat count of the parties is known, but that does not mean it is not worthwhile to educate all of us on this point every now and then by electing a prime minister from among our own number.

The second point that Professor Cyr made, which is more substantive, is that there should be no prorogation by any prime minister, and the way that Professor Cyr put it was, “To amend the Standing Orders so that asking for Parliament to be prorogued or dissolved would not be possible without first obtaining the approval of the House of Commons. If a prime minister were to do so, that would result automatically in a loss of confidence and the Governor General would not be bound by the prime minister's advice requesting an early dissolution or prorogation without first obtaining the approval of the House of Commons.”

There was another proposal that I think is very important. This is one of the only parliaments in the world where there is no time limit for when we must convene following an election. Professor Peter Russell suggested, as well as Professor Cyr, that right now, in theory, a prime minister, after an election, could wait a year or two and not convene parliament. There is no rule. Almost every other democracy in the world puts in a time limit, whether it is eight weeks or whatever. That is a change to the Standing Orders that would be welcome.

There is also a suggestion that is quite significant, and I know that the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona is an advocate for this one as well. It is that we go forward with constructive non-confidence votes. This is described by Professor Russell in his testimony. Some parliaments, such as in Germany, Spain and Sweden, permit only a constructive non-confidence vote. He goes on to say:

A constructive non-confidence vote is one that names an alternative prime minister. When a constructive non-confidence vote passes, it both defeats the incumbent government and indicates how a new, viable minority government can be formed without calling an election. This practice underlines the principle that in a parliamentary democracy the people elect a parliament...not a government.

These are very significant changes suggested by the best and brightest in our country, who happen to have shared their time with the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

I would like to suggest another thing that would really make a big difference, and that would be if we enforce the rules we had. The Standing—

• (1645)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I just need to interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Manicouagan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I wonder if we have quorum.

And the count having been taken:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, we have quorum.

[English]

The hon. member may proceed.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, the suggestion I would have is that we enforce our own rules. That would include that, during question period, only the Speaker decides who seeks the floor.

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I have a quote from our former Speaker in a ruling. The hon. member went from being Speaker to being leader of the Conservative Party. In response to a request from the late Mark Warawa that his rights had been violated, the Speaker ruled, “The right to seek the floor at any time is the right of each individual member of Parliament and is not dependent on any other member of Parliament.” He further said, “If members want to be recognized, they will have to actively demonstrate that they wish to participate. They have to rise in their places and seek the floor.”

We are the only country in all Westminster parliamentary democracy countries, the only country in the Commonwealth, where a Speaker has surrendered the fundamental right and duty of a Speaker to recognize the member who will then have the floor.

It was an accident of history. It was because Jeanne Sauvé, when she was Speaker, said she could not see members in the far corners. She asked for the party whips to do her a personal favour and provide a list. This has now become custom and tradition, but it is still not part of our rules. While it is not part of our rules, we should take some time to discuss it in the review of the Standing Orders at PROC and ask what they do in the U.K.

I asked and I found out. In the U.K., any member who is going to ask a question the next day provides a letter to the Speaker in advance showing the question they want to ask. The Speaker then identifies that member so they are not all at the same time looking for the floor when the Prime Minister is answering questions.

It works well. It would make a fundamental improvement in this place in terms of decorum and the functioning of the place. Someone, as a rising politician, wants to curry favour with someone else who controls their life. If the Speaker has no influence at all on whether someone gets their TV time during question period, it is easy to ignore what the Speaker says. The person who controls one's life is the party whip, because they put the names on a piece of paper.

The importance of the question we have to ask about the work we are doing, as parliamentarians, is that the power shifts entirely to backroom political parties and away from the Speaker, who controls this place in every other Parliament around the world except here. We need to show deference to the Speaker and deference to Speaker's authority, and pay attention to the Standing Orders, which say we are not to interrupt another member while speaking and we are not to speak disrespectfully of any other member in this place.

They are broken daily as rules. I lament this very often because I think it brings this Parliament, democracy and all of us into disrepute. The public looks at what we are doing. Earlier today, a whole school group left this place and I think it was because the proceedings were so unruly. It is not what any school teacher would allow in a classroom.

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Before I run out of time, I also want to speak to another aspect of our rules, which is not to give written speeches. That is against our rules. The substantive difference would be when the House leaders are considering how much time we need for a bill. If a bill is unanimously supported in this place, we do not need to debate it forever.

Whether a bill is controversial or not, if every House leader had to think about who in the ranks of their team has the capacity to stand and speak on a particular matter of policy without a set, prepared speech to read, the number of potential speakers would drop quite a bit.

This place has allowed a trend where political parties control far too much of what goes on here. If a party whip knows they do not have that many people who could stand and speak to a policy, they are going to pick the people who have studied it and who care about it. That is an important rule that we ignore on a routine basis.

What they do in the U.K., and which would be a change to our Standing Orders, is the Speaker recognizes someone to give a speech and they have potentially 40 minutes or more. They can pause and yield the floor to another member of their own party, and then it becomes interactive. It becomes quite interesting. The person who is holding the floor sits down and says they yield the floor to their hon. colleague. Then the person who is asking the question gets an interactive opportunity for discussion. The debates are much more interesting. I also commend that to be considered by PROC when it looks at our Standing Orders.

• (1650)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I often compare notes regarding the Standing Orders. One area that the member did not touch on, which we looked at when we sat on the electoral reform committee, is work-life balance. If I remember correctly, she had suggested that perhaps we would sit three weeks in a row, then maybe have three weeks back in our riding, and then three weeks in a row here. Could the member elaborate a bit on the calendar? She did not mention that in her speech and I would like to give her an opportunity to do so.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, the work-life balance problem is almost insoluble because the country is so large, but I am also looking at the carbon content of our work in this place. I call it the Fort McMurray work schedule, by the way. It would be three weeks on, three weeks off, but when we are here, we would extend the number of days we are sitting. We would sit a full five-day week and half a day on Saturday, because we would make good use of the time. Then, when we are back in our ridings for three weeks, with very little adjustment, I think the local chamber of commerce, the local Rotary Club and the local service organizations would know not to plan an event when they know the member cannot come, and they would pick one of those stretches when the member is physically there.

It would reduce the amount of wear and tear on each of us. It is not perfect for everyone, but I do think it would be a good solution and reduce the monetary costs of our travel to the taxpayer and the amount of carbon.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have disagreed with the member quite a bit in the last couple of

days, but in her speech now I think she was on to something and I will ask her to comment a bit further.

She talked about giving the member who has the floor the ability to yield the floor to a colleague. In the U.K., members can also yield the floor to a member of the opposition and in so doing obtain more time for their allotment. Would she care to comment on how that could lead to true debate in this House, not exchanges of canned speeches, but actual engagement between members, not just within a party but across parties? It is considered bad manners in the United Kingdom not to yield when a member rises.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, that is exactly how it takes place. We should be more familiar. We do not want to be, in every respect, parroting what happens in the U.K. Particularly, it is important for us to have desks. We know that, with 650 members of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster, they cannot all fit in the room all at once.

However, in this instance, in debates, it is about yielding the floor to a colleague and entering into a discussion, to be able to have a more respectful and reflective exchange in a context that is built around the notion that every member in the place is not reading a speech and is well informed on the topic. These debates are very interesting and engaging and they advance the understanding of issues.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, it is important to have these discussions, and probably more frequently.

I know the member and I agree on something very clearly, and that is the idea that we need more proportional representation and that it would be good to be in this place knowing that every vote in this country matters and was reflected in the seats around the table and in the House.

A lot of members have come to me from my own riding who are supporters of proportional representation, but are also frustrated that every time there is an election and we get another minority government, we see this cynicism across the country that this is going to last 18 months or maybe two years at the maximum. A lot of my constituents have asked why there is not a rule that the government has to last for four years and members have to find a way to work together collaboratively to get things done. We should not be asked, as citizens of Canada, to continually have elections. When we put people here, they should work together.

I just wonder if the member could speak to that.

• (1655)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, a mandatory rule that we sit for four years and find ways to work together is not really consistent with the principles of Westminster parliamentary democracy, but I do think a way around it is this notion of a constructive non-confidence vote. If there is a clear sense that the Prime Minister or the ruling party has lost the confidence and we are an assembly of parties in a minority situation, the constructive non-confidence vote, which Professor Russell spoke of and which I quoted as evidence, would be to say that we are now proposing a different person. The name of a new prime minister would be part of the constructive non-confidence motion and it would not drive us straight to an election.

I do think we—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today. I have quite a bit to say, so I am going to get right to it. I am going to talk about unanimous consent motions. I am going to talk about debates, committees, hybrid Parliament and vote pairing.

I am going to begin by addressing the increasing trend toward using unanimous consent motions to make declarations of national policy on behalf of the House. I know there is a lengthy history of members using UC motions to score political points or to shortcut the legislative process, but this is an abuse of power, one that actually originally led to the creation of Standing Order 31, which allows members to make one-minute statements on absolutely anything.

In recent years, all parties, but especially the smaller opposition parties, have been increasingly springing UC motions on the House of Commons after question period, proposing motions that sometimes impose serious ramifications on the government. They often end up passing, because no member wants to be the one who stands up and opposes a cleverly worded motion on an emotionally charged hot-button topic.

I know, Madam Speaker, that you have cautioned members about the abuse of UC motions, and I applaud you for trying to curb this abuse.

I would propose that when seeking consent to propose a UC motion that contains a position on any event or policy or a motion that would skip over legislative processes in advancing a bill, the mover of the motion must table a letter, signed by the House leader of each recognized party, to prove that each party was actually consulted and has agreed that unanimous consent should be sought.

Members would still be free to deny consent, but if the Standing Orders force the mover to table proof that the motion is truly the product of genuine consultation and agreement, we could stop the absurd, almost daily occurrence in the House of political grandstanding by UC motion at the end of question period.

There is a reason why bills are debated at each stage and why they have to be studied at committee before passage. There is a rea-

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son why opposition parties have supply days that they can use to propose almost anything. There is a reason why we have S.O. 31s. It is because these are the appropriate ways to pass bills, to declare the House's will and for members to make their views on bills known, not by a surprise UC motion after QP.

Next, I would like to talk about debates. We had a good exchange in the last speech about it, and I agree with what the previous speaker had to say about it, but I have something a little simpler to propose, and that is just amending Standing Order 43 to reverse the proportion of time for speeches and for questions and comments, so that instead of most speeches being 10 minutes long, followed by five minutes of questions and comments, we reverse that. A member speaks for five minutes, followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments.

This is an easy fix. It is a clean change. It will not impact the daily rubric or change the number of speaking times during the day, but it will allow for more members to participate in debate, as long as Liberals will stand up and not leave it to the member for Winnipeg North every time, and it would allow ideas to be tested more vigorously.

Most members can make their points in five minutes. In fact, members should be encouraged to make their main points in five minutes and if they cannot, or if their points demand more time, they will have the opportunity to make those points during the debate, in the back-and-forth this change would create. This change would give us real debate, not just canned speeches one after another.

As for committees, there are a lot of problems with the present committee structure, some that could be fixed by Standing Orders changes.

First, the priority of committees is to study legislation, to study spending estimates and, in some cases, to receive reports from officers of Parliament. These are the priorities of committees, but some committees seldom receive bills. Some have minimal or no estimates to study. Many do not have an officer of Parliament who reports to them, and yet they meet every week, twice a week usually, whether they need to or not. They produce reports that nobody reads and that the government ignores.

Ordinarily, this would not be a big problem, except that right now we are having to ration room allocation and translation resources, so this is a problem. It might be time for a standing committee cull.

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• (1700)

Let me give an example. Does the House of Commons need a Standing Committee on Science? Science is important. The government needs advice on science and input on science, but does it need a standing committee? There are no estimates to be looked at. There are no officers of Parliament to report to it. Members do not need the extraordinary powers of a parliamentary committee to compel testimony or the production of documents at the science committee. I offer that merely as an example of the most recent addition to standing committee bloat, but this is how these things happen. This committee came about by way of a PMB, which is not the way to change a standing order. Standing Orders ought to be changed by consensus, not by a recorded division in the House of Commons.

In addition to that, committees often fail to study issues critically when they break down along partisan lines. This is a problem during majority governments, because the governing party controls every aspect of the committees' agenda. Committees work a little better during minority Parliaments, because members from at least two parties need to work together to pass a motion, but even so, committees often still descend into naked partisanship and politics.

The House should seriously consider the U.K. model, where committee chairs and membership are determined by secret ballot among the members, not by party whips, and where whips are absolutely forbidden from attempting to influence the affairs of a committee. We can imagine if members had to campaign among their colleagues based on their own wisdom and expertise, and if voting instructions from a whip to a committee member constituted a violation of privilege. We would have the historical independence of committees restored pretty quickly.

I am running out of time, but I want to address the current temporary hybrid Parliament, the voting app and vote pairing, if I can.

Many members know that I opposed a hybrid Parliament from the very beginning. From the outset of the pandemic, I really believed that limited in-person attendance could have been achieved through vote pairing. Surely, now we are at the point where video conference participation can be dispensed with. The problem is that ministers should not be permitted to insulate themselves from this place. This chamber is the citadel of democratic accountability, and ministers should not be given a tool that enables them to avoid this place or to reduce the importance of this place.

I have heard all the arguments in favour of maintaining a voting app or any other expedience in the name of flexibility. Travel schedules and family life balance are important issues. Those are the main arguments that are usually offered, but to those putting forward these arguments, I would say this. Will we collectively be better legislators if we are permitted to let the votes we cast on behalf of our constituents be done entirely at our own convenience, voting from restaurants, from bars or cocktail receptions in the area here, from airplanes, moving cars or cottages, from the middle of unrelated business meetings or while cooking dinner? Is that really what we want? Do we want voting in the House of Commons to be reduced to the world's least cool and least fun video game? I certainly do not.

Furthermore, should we make it easier for MPs to insulate themselves from other MPs, from members of the opposition or from their own colleagues? Should we really reduce the number of times when MPs are forced to be in proximity to each other, where they can actually interact in the most informal ways and maybe, just maybe, have a chance to build confidence, rapport and trust between members of opposing parties? That is what a permanent hybrid Parliament and voting by selfie will do. It will eliminate these limited opportunities where we actually meet face to face and engage with each other, including with our own colleagues within our own caucuses. For that reason, I continue to oppose the hybrid Parliament and the voting application.

What about this need for flexibility? We heard in debate earlier about the disincentive to run because of the impacts on family, but the answer is right before us in the existing Standing Orders. There is an ancient tradition of vote pairing, and there is even a provision for pairs to be made in writing and placed in a book on the table. A standing order could be changed or added so that no member's vote shall count once the member and a paired member have signed the book. That way nobody can break a pair. These members can be paired either through the coordination of party whips or without coordination. Either way, it can be done.

I am out of time. I look forward to questions from members.

• (1705)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned something that piqued my interest, because I too am in agreement with respect to committee membership and chairs, and I like the idea of having a secret ballot for naming committee chairs.

One aspect of committee work that I found quite surprising when I first got here is that it is very adversarial given the way that committees are structured. We have an issue before us and want to study it, but we are sitting on opposing sides instead of having a workgroup that sits together so we can say, "Here is the issue. What do we think about it?" There is no interchange, really, between committee members. We sit on opposing sides, we have witnesses at the end of the table and we have little time to ask questions, but we are not actually speaking to each other and trying to figure out a solution to whatever issue we are debating or whatever study we are doing.

I would like to know if the member has any comment on how we can be more collaborative in committee when trying to find a solution we can all agree with.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, that is a great question with great observations.

I am not so fussed about the room layout and the adversarial nature of committee. It only becomes a problem when things become personal. If we meet in the same room rather than over video, we have the opportunity to get up from our opposite sides of the table and maybe go over to the coffee machine to have a quick, private word off the record to gain some understanding. We could walk together to the office afterward or maybe even go for a quick bite before question period. It is during these informal opportunities that members of Parliament can engage with each other in a non-adversarial way.

The adversarial system works when it is strictly about ideas and is not personal, and that is why I think it is so important for members to be forced by daily routine to interact with each other.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge for his speech.

I believe that there are some things we agree on with respect to the hybrid Parliament. I found the points he raised to be very interesting.

I would like to ask him a question about constituents. We often hear about the advantages or disadvantages for elected members of voting from home, as though it were a video game. At the same time, we are accountable to our constituents.

In his opinion, what are the disadvantages of the hybrid Parliament? I know he mentioned a few of them. The disadvantages of the hybrid Parliament may be unintentional, but we could address them. How can we better serve constituents by being in this place rather than at home?

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, we represent our constituents when we are in this place. Our action in this place is what we are accountable to our constituents for, so I think it is critical that we spend the time in this place to do our jobs representing them in Parliament.

Now, one needs to be in touch with constituents. That is why we have lengthy constituency breaks to interact with our constituents. However, we cannot represent our constituents when we are in our constituency. We represent our constituents when we are in Parliament. That is where the votes take place, that is where the debates on ideas take place and that is where we can advocate for and represent our constituents.

● (1710)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague made some interesting points. What I found interesting was the point about switching the 10-minute speech with the five-minute question period so that people had more time to ask questions, although I will note that he used his full 10 minutes to get his point across, which I find a bit ironic.

In terms of the expansion on questions, one of the things I found interesting as a new member in hybrid Parliament was the ability to ask questions during question period but in the way that we do it during committee of the whole, with a five-minute period of time. It allows for more debate.

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In terms of the expansion for questions, would the member be in favour of changing how we operate during question period to more of a committee of the whole type of debate?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, yes, indeed I would. The committee of the whole is a much better format for getting real answers. However, I am sorry; I have to say it: Since 2019, there has even been a marked decline in the quality of that forum. I have participated in several committees of the whole and have watched the ministers. They have a whole group of officials in front of them and binders of information. Those officials would have spent hours and hours preparing, but when we ask questions, the ministers simply recite talking points as if it was question period. There is some responsibility on the government to ensure that they act responsibly and answer questions.

To the member's point about question period, yes, absolutely.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to an idea that I think most would agree with, in general terms at least: We ought to modernize Parliament to enable all of us to better represent Canadians. What does that mean specifically? Well, many of us have proposed very specific examples, and I want to tackle this at a bit of a higher level because there are three general ideas we should be grappling with.

The first is about flexibility. I heard what my colleague from the Conservative Party said. By the way, we have worked together on committee, and I think we were a pretty independent committee, even in a majority government context, but I heard a dismissal of flexibility.

I take the point that for a serious vote, we should all be there, potentially, absent emergency circumstances. I was certainly in Parliament in person yesterday when we were voting on the bill for evidence-based drug policy. I thought it was really important to be there in person. I do not think it is important to miss my five-year-old's first baseball game at 6:30 p.m. in East York, this summer at least. I do not think it is important for a procedural vote. I think we can accommodate different votes in different ways, and have different flexibilities for different families in different contexts.

I do think the voting app continues to remain of utmost importance, particularly if people care about young families engaging in Parliament. By the way, I probably will not even consider running again, frankly, if we do not have greater flexibility in this place. I also think of colleagues with loved ones who, in their circumstances, need care as they are sick, or members themselves who are ill. I do not think vote pairing is the ready solution there. I think we need to accommodate members in order to ensure that we are representing our constituents in full and that there is flexibility there.

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I do not want to be dismissive of the point, by the way, that we need to be there in person to build relationships. I value the time I spent in person between 2015 and 2019 in particular, when there was a full in-person Parliament. I have relationships across party lines too, and I have been able to build on those relationships even in a virtual environment. In building those relationships at first, certainly being in person meant a lot.

When we look at our 26-week sitting calendar, it may be that in certain weeks there is no flexibility, and then there is flexibility at other times. Maintaining some definite in-person component and allowing flexibility in other weeks may be the solution as far as that goes. Regardless, that has to be looked at seriously and the voting app should be there to stay.

The second broad point is we ought to look at these rules first for flexibility and second for empowering parliamentarians. I have heard some conversation today about the frustration with the arcane nature of Private Members' Business. It is frustrating. I have been lucky, actually. I have effectively won the lottery three times. I am a lucky man, much to the chagrin of the government, I think. In winning the lottery, I have also seen others who are so far down the list they will never have their bills or motions debated and voted upon.

I want to quote a former Conservative colleague, Bruce Stanton. I think he was one of the most thoughtful individuals regarding the Standing Orders and our parliamentary work. He wrote, "On the whole, a parallel chamber for the House of Commons would strengthen the democratic process in Canada's Parliament by giving MPs greater means to legislate and challenge the Executive Branch of government. As such, the idea deserves our careful consideration."

This is not a new idea. It exists in Australia. It has existed for many years in Australia and also in the United Kingdom. This is from the chamber in the U.K.:

Since 1999 the House of Commons has held debates in a parallel debating chamber, known as "Westminster Hall".

This chamber is used for debates on issues raised by backbench Members, for debates on select committee reports, for debates on subjects selected by the Backbench Business Committee and for debates on e-petitions.

Before I got into this business, a friend of mine from law school gave me Samara Canada's *Tragedy in the Commons*. It almost scared me away, frankly, because it is a lament. Every single exit interview is a lament to say, "I wish I had done more."

We should be empowering parliamentarians via a parallel chamber or some other means. Every single measure we look at should be looked at through this lens of empowering parliamentarians. Adjournment debates could be held in these parallel chambers as well. We ought to be looking at these changes through the lens of empowering parliamentarians, and a parallel chamber is certainly one of the ways to do that.

• (1715)

If we do not want to think of a physical space, then perhaps we can think of a virtual space for that parallel chamber. It happens to already exist.

Before I get to the third point, I want to reference the idea of the independence of committees. This is one place where rules can

matter. I want to emphasize my agreement with the idea of electing committee members and chairs via secret ballot as a chamber, but I emphasize to colleagues that it is also about the way we conduct ourselves. This is about culture too. There are ways of ensuring committees are more independent if we act as we ought to act in this place and we embrace a different culture, so let us change the rules but let us not forget our own place in changing the culture.

The third point is related to the second one. As we look at changing the rules, we ought to look at flexibility, number one; two, empowering parliamentarians; and three, at decentralizing operations and reducing party control. Others have already spoken to this point about the role of the Speaker and have said that the power of the Speaker needs to be returned.

I do not ask questions particularly in question period, because it is wrought and it is a theatric exercise, to put it politely. It does not need to be that way and it ought not to be that way.

I think in two different ways about empowering the Speaker. One is that it would encourage those on the government side to ask more pointed questions. Second, it would ensure decorum on the opposition side. That is critical not only in relation to questions but also for S. O. 31s.

Finally, I am not going to use my full 10 minutes, but I want to make this point, a point related to what my Conservative colleague just put forward. We should not be restricted to five minutes as far as our speeches go, but I do think we should be able to use five minutes or two minutes or eight minutes to give our remarks and that the remainder of that 15 minutes should be for questions. It should be our decision how much time we use to speak, and the remainder of the time should be used for questions and answers. Sometimes I just want to speak for one minute and would love to have 14 minutes of questions.

With that, I look forward to questions.

• (1720)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the evening is getting short, so I want to offer the member an opportunity to comment further on pairing. Like the member who spoke before, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, I also have not liked the fact that a hybrid Parliament has allowed for a reduction in accountability and transparency in this place. I have seen things get worse. I was elected in the same year, in 2015.

I would like to hear from this member how we could perhaps use pairing more to achieve the flexibility so that members in this House could go to family commitments or take care of dependents who are seriously ill while also ensuring that we are able to perform the duties that our constituents sent us here to do.

Pairing has been around for hundreds of years. In fact, it was during World War II that hundreds of members sometimes would be paired for particular votes because they had duties outside of this House.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, pairing has a long history, but it does not have a long history of being used in a very flexible way.

When there is a procedural vote and it is more of a last-minute vote, I wish the best of luck to all of us to sort out a pairing mechanism to accommodate the members who need to be accommodated. It is fiction that pairing gets us to a place of flexibility that we need to get to.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beaches—East York for his speech. He brought up several worthwhile ideas, especially with respect to private members' bills, for which there is a kind of lottery.

I would like to hear his thoughts about question period and the fact that the government asks itself questions. Does my colleague think that this is an appropriate or useful practice? Does he think it could be replaced by something else?

[English]

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, I am not certain that I am in a position to say we should replace question period. Question period has existed far beyond my time in Parliament, and for good reason. It can be used incredibly effectively. It can be used to effectively to prosecute a case; it can be used very effectively to put issues on the agenda; it can also be used very effectively to raise specific constituents' concerns.

It can be used effectively, but is it used effectively very often? Unfortunately, no. I do not think we should be looking at replacing it wholesale, but I do think we should be looking at ways to improve it. I actually tend to agree with the comments from NDP colleagues in particular, and I think there was even agreement on the Conservatives' side, in relation to the way we conducted ourselves typically in committee of the whole, where it is a back-and-forth. It is not for the cameras but to engage and have a real debate.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I am sorry. My question was misunderstood, so I did not get the right answer. Perhaps I could clarify.

I was not talking about question period as a whole. My question was about when members of the governing party ask their own government questions.

[English]

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, in that case, I think I answered in the course of my comments, but I and others would be able to put pointed questions to the government in question period if we were able to be accommodated via the Speaker and not the whip's office.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments in support of us doing what we can to ensure that Parliament is inclusive and ensure that we maintain hybrid Parliament in particular.

Although there are many involved in parenting, we know that women are often those who are taking on a lot of those primary re-

sponsibilities in child rearing, and we know that right now that only 30% in Parliament are women. That number needs to increase. We need to do what we can to ensure that becoming a member of Parliament is successful. We have a lot of skills out there, and we need to do what we can to encourage that. We are still in the COVID pandemic, so we need to make sure we have access to do our jobs through this pandemic.

I am wondering if the member could share with us today what actions he will be taking to ensure that his colleagues in the Liberal Parliament are on board with maintaining a hybrid system so women and all those with many skills in our government—

● (1725)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member has the opportunity to answer in 15 seconds or less.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Madam Speaker, I know many colleagues have seen probably first-hand the importance of virtual Parliament in my own life, because my kids are often on the screen. I am a better father. I am also a better parliamentarian and certainly a better husband. I have spoken to colleagues about this, and I will continue to speak to colleagues on all sides of the chamber, but especially on my own side.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are three reforms to the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees that the House should consider.

First, the Speaker's right of recognition should be restored. The Speaker has effectively lost the right of recognition during many proceedings of this House: during debate, during Oral Questions and during other proceedings of the House. That right of recognition has been replaced by the list system, managed by the whips and House leaders, which has effectively displaced the Speaker's authority.

During most of the proceedings of this House, in order for a member to speak, the member's name has to be put on a list to speak by the House leader or whip's office, but too often members do not have a voice in the House because they cannot get on the list, which is submitted by the House leaders and whips to the Speaker and the computer screen in front of you, Madam Speaker, to determine who gets to speak.

The House should do away with the list system and replace it with a system established and controlled by the Speaker. That system should have two principles: First, all members who wish to speak should get to speak; second, time allocated to individual members who wish to speak should be distributed as equitably as possible to those members who wish to speak.

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As I understand it, in the U.K. Parliament, members who wish to speak, whether to a bill or during Oral Questions, go through a system established and controlled by the Speaker. For example, all members who wish to speak to a bill get to speak, because the time allotted for debate is divided by the number of members who wish to speak. Those members go to the Speaker, rather than through their whips or House leaders, to indicate that they wish to speak. For example, if four hours are allotted for debate on a bill at second reading and 40 members have indicated to the Speaker they wish to speak, the 240 minutes are divided by the 40 members. Thus, six minutes are allotted to each member to speak. In that system, members who wish to speak get to speak, which is more fair and more equitable than the system we have.

I hope all members of this House will take up this idea of restoring the Speaker's right of recognition and thereby restoring a more equitable distribution of time for members in this House to speak.

The second area of reform the House should consider is standing committees. In 2002, the Standing Orders were changed, a move supported by then finance minister Paul Martin, to address the democratic deficit by replacing the appointment of committee chairs with their election. Unfortunately, that well-intentioned change has not worked out in practice. While technically committee members can elect committee chairs, they are effectively appointed, 21 by the Prime Minister and four by the leader of the official opposition. That is because the moving of a nomination of a member for chair is done in public, and the whips use that fact to ensure that only the member whom the Prime Minister or the official opposition leader wishes to be chair is nominated for the position, with the result that the member is acclaimed as chair.

One way to fix this is to require a secret preferential ballot on which all the names are listed of committee members of the recognized party from which the chair is to be selected. That way, no nominations for chair take place, and the 12 members of the committee decide on a secret single preferential ballot who will be chair.

To make committees more effective, a second reform should be considered. The House should consider distributing the 25 chairs of standing committees in a way that is proportionate to the recognized parties in this House. Currently, the ministerial party has 21 out of 25 chairs and the official opposition has four out of 25 chairs. The NDP and the Bloc have no chairs of standing committees. This is not proportionate to the standings of the various recognized parties in the House of Commons and does not reflect the Parliament that Canadians elected back in the 2021 election.

The House should also consider a third change to committees so that committee members would be elected by members of their respective recognized party caucuses. These elections on a secret preferential ballot could take place at the same time that the House meets to elect the new Speaker.

• (1730)

Taken in totality, a secret ballot preferential election of committee chairs, a secret ballot preferential election of committee members and the proportionate distribution of standing committee chairs among the recognized parties in the House would have the effect of making standing committees much more independent of party lead-

ers, particularly the Prime Minister, with a greater ability to hold the government accountable to a much greater degree.

I will add that these reforms were enacted by the U.K. Parliament a decade ago and they had been adopted to a great degree of acclimation. By all accounts, they have been a great success, and they have strengthened the committee system.

The third area of reform the House should consider is to take away the Prime Minister's power to make key appointments in this place. The clerk of the House of Commons should be appointed by the Speaker and not by the Prime Minister. In other Westminster parliaments, the clerk is appointed by the Speaker on the recommendation of a committee of MPs that has vetted various candidates. In fact, in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, that is exactly the process that is in place, as is the case in the U.K. Parliament and in the Australian Parliament.

The Sergeant-at-Arms should also be appointed by the Speaker, rather than the Prime Minister. Most importantly, the majority of the members on the Board of Internal Economy should not be appointed by the Prime Minister, either directly or indirectly, but rather elected by the members of this House on a secret ballot. Members of the ministry, as well as officers of the House on both sides of the aisle, should not be eligible for the majority of positions on the BOIE. In other words, the majority of members on the BOIE should be backbench members of Parliament elected by their peers on a secret ballot vote.

Those are three areas of reform the House should consider. First, restoring the Speaker's right of recognition by empowering the Speaker to establish a new system whereby members get recognized, a system that is controlled and managed by the Speaker. Second, reforms to committees that will make them more independent of party leaders, particularly the Prime Minister. Third, remove the Prime Minister's power to appoint the clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the majority of members on the BOIE, and giving that power, through an election, to members of Parliament.

I have a couple of final comments. It is my view that the rights and privileges in this place are increasingly attaching to recognized parties, rather than to the 337 individual members of this House. For example, members who are not members of recognized parties cannot sit as a regular member on a committee.

Another example is that routine motions at committee increasingly divide time among the four recognized parties on a committee, rather than among the 11 members. As a result, some members get way more time on committees than others do. This has created a two-tier system. Those who are members of recognized parties have greater rights than those who are members of non-recognized parties in this place.

We have also created a two-tier system within recognized parties in this House. Those who are under the good grace and favour from the party leadership get to speak when they want, get on committees they want, and so on.

Up to the 1960s, for over 100 years, our parliamentary conventions attached rights and privileges to individual members elected to legislatures and parliaments across the land, rather than to parties. With the establishment of recognized parties in this House in the 1960s, rights are increasingly attached to the parties rather than to individuals. It can be argued that this has subverted our constitutional order, which was clearly set up to recognize the individual member as the primary organizing entity and the party as secondary. This is an issue we all need to be thinking about as we contemplate reforms to this place to strengthen our parliamentary democracy.

Finally, hybrid Parliament must end. We must end hybrid Parliament when we adjourn in June. While we may continue with the voting app, we need to return to full, in-person Parliament when Parliament resumes this September. It is vitally important for this House and its committees to go back to full, in-person sittings to ensure that we, once again, strengthen our parliamentary democracy and ensure that we pass along this institution to our children and grandchildren stronger than we inherited it.

• (1735)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to say I really appreciate the comments from my friend and colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills today. He is a beacon of experience and knowledge in this place, and I know that, of all members of the House, he is always fighting for a more equal chance for all.

My questions have to do with two inalienable features that govern all of our lives, and they are time and space.

First, I would like to know his thoughts on a secondary chamber for things like late shows and PMBs, creating a menu of options for members to consider and choose from when entering this place for debate. We spend a lot of time in Ottawa, and I feel that would make it more efficient. It is not just June that I am talking about.

Second, toward the end, the member got to the point of virtual Parliament. The member and I can drive here. We live close. The member opposite is just one riding north of mine and it is about four or five hours to drive. However, colleagues across this House do not have that luxury, so I wonder what his considerations are for members with young kids and members from places like Yukon, the northern territories and northern British Columbia.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, on the first part of the question, which had to do with a secondary chamber, I support the idea of the creation of a secondary chamber. I know in the Palace of Westminster they have Westminster Hall, which is often used for parallel debates that cannot take place in the main chamber.

With respect to the House schedule over the year, I do not support reducing the number of days this place sits. If we eliminate Fridays, we have to tack on additional weeks of Monday to Thursday. We already sit fewer weeks than any major legislature in the west. The fact is we sit less today than we did half a century ago. We reduced the number of weeks that we sit to 27 about 40 years ago. The U.K. Parliament sits to the end of the third week in August and then only takes a short three-week recess before it resumes

around the same time that we do. The U.S. Congress has similar lengthy sitting times.

We cannot reduce the amount of time we sit, because that reduces the accountability of the executive branch of government to the legislative branch, and in Canada that is the only accountability mechanism. Canadians do not directly elect the prime minister or the ministry here. They are appointed based on the confidence convention from this legislature, and we need to ensure that this legislature sits as much as possible in order to ensure accountability.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. I am convinced that he was a great artist in a previous life; he really used some very constructive and creative words in his speech.

I want to address one of the last parts of his presentation. He would like to see the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and the members of the Board of Internal Economy appointed by the Speaker of the House.

The Speaker still comes from a political party. How can my colleague be sure that this would result in more neutrality and objectivity?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, currently, the Prime Minister appoints the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms of the House of Commons. Clearly, the Prime Minister is more partisan than the Speaker of the House of Commons. If the Speaker of the House were granted this power, then I am sure that it would enhance the neutrality of these two roles on Parliament Hill.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated all of the examples the member for Wellington—Halton Hills cited from the mother Parliament. There are a lot of lessons that we can draw from them, and I think he would agree with me that time is our most valuable currency in this place.

I would be curious to hear the member's thoughts on Fridays. I agree we should keep Fridays, but maybe there is an opportunity to pass the 2:30 p.m. mark to give members of Parliament the option for more space to debate private members' business. Maybe we could devote some time to take-note debates. It would be there as an option for members who were willing to participate.

I also liked the member's interventions on the summer. May and June are silly season because we are trying to cram eight sitting weeks into a nine-week space. It would do a lot more for our sanity if maybe we spaced every two sitting weeks with a constituency week but went into the summer. We could have more time, but try to keep our sanity. I would like to hear his thoughts on that.

Private Members' Business

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I am open to eliminating Friday sittings. There are approximately 27 Friday sittings, so if we were to add five or six weeks to the parliamentary calendar to sit until the end of July or even the middle of August, I would very supportive of that. If we sit Monday to Thursday for, let us say, 32 or 33 weeks of the year, I would be very supportive of it.

Whatever changes we make, we have to make sure that we do not reduce the number of sitting days of the House, which I believe is too few to begin with.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:42 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 51(2), the matter is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from March 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-240, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (donations involving private corporation shares or real estate), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to speak to Bill C-240, which was introduced by the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

I had the opportunity to sit with him on the Standing Committee on Finance. All of his interventions were a testament to his commitment, diligence and thoroughness. This bill is no different.

Bill C-240 is the latest version of Bill C-256, which was introduced during the previous Parliament and was, itself, a newer version of a measure that the Harper government had presented in its last budget in the spring of 2015. This measure unfortunately never took effect because the Liberals withdrew it when they came to power.

Bill C-240 would amend the Income Tax Act to provide an exemption from capital gains tax in respect of certain arm's length dispositions resulting from the donation of real estate or private corporation shares to charity. Bill C-240 would apply to gifts of real property if the donation is made to a qualified donee within 30 days of the disposition of the property to an arm's length third party.

We at the Bloc Québécois naturally support the principle of Bill C-240. I first heard about this principle from the former leader of our party, Gilles Duceppe, who put me in touch with Mr. Johnson, who is sort of the driving force behind this bill. I had a chance to discuss the principle with him on a few occasions. I also had the opportunity to talk with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley about all of Mr. Johnson's work and his commitment to this issue.

Coming back to the principle of Bill C-240, right now, when a taxpayer donates a building or privately held shares to a charity, the taxpayer is presumed to have disposed of it at fair market value and must pay tax on the capital gains they have earned. Then, they receive an official receipt for the amount of the donation, also at fair market value.

Since a wealthy taxpayer's tax rate is generally higher than the tax deduction associated with a charitable donation, which is capped at 75% of net income, the taxpayer ends up paying some tax on their capital gains, even if they did not actually pocket the gains.

Under Bill C-240, all real property would be subject to the same tax provision that already exists for ecologically sensitive land that is donated, for example, to nature conservation organizations. Since all charities provide valuable services to the community, we believe it is only fair that the donations they receive be treated in the same way for tax purposes.

Also on the subject of fairness, donations of shares in private companies would now be treated in the same way as donations of shares in publicly traded companies, which are already exempt from capital gains tax. At first glance, this seems fair.

As I said, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle. However, this bill needs to be studied closely in committee since it raises questions about both effectiveness and fairness.

With respect to the effectiveness of providing funding for charities, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has estimated that passing this bill could result in the government losing out on \$775.5 million in revenue over five years.

In return, however, donations of real estate and shares in private companies would increase from \$2.9 billion to \$3.9 billion. That means the government would be paying \$775 million to generate an additional \$981 million in donations.

However, it is not clear whether these \$981 million in donations of real estate and private corporation shares would be entirely new donations. It is possible that some of them would have been made anyway, but in some other form. The elasticity model used by the Parliamentary Budget Officer to assess the impact of the bill does not make this clear.

If some of that \$900 million in donations would have been made anyway, it is possible that the measure will cost the government more than it brings in for charity. That is something that the committee will obviously have to seriously consider.

Also, the \$775 million over five years in lost government revenue is quite substantial. According to the government's tax expenditure statement, the capital gains tax exemption for donations of shares in publicly traded companies represented a \$105 million shortfall in 2021. Adding private corporations and real estate would increase that by 150%. According to the most recent data I could find, total charitable donations deductions were about \$4 billion in 2021: \$3.2 billion for individuals, and \$725 million for corporations. All of this should be taken into account when the bill is considered in committee.

• (1745)

There is also the issue of tax fairness. The reason we have tax credits for charitable donations is to recognize the public value of charitable organizations and to elicit donations. Anyone who makes a donation gets a receipt that will reduce their taxable income. If the tax credit is to fulfill its role, it must be neutral, no matter the nature of the gift. If some donations generate greater tax benefits than others, the tax credit will incentivize certain taxpayers to structure their affairs with tax avoidance in mind, rather than eliciting more donations. We must, at all costs, prevent this from becoming a tax avoidance technique.

Consider the relationship between the capital gains exemption and the depreciation of a property. Every year, the owner of an income property can deduct a portion of the value of the property from their income during the time they own the property. At the same time, as the book value of the property continues to diminish, the capital gain realized at the time of sale is higher.

With Bill C-240, this capital gain would become tax exempt. Will the taxpayer have to pay back the amortization tax deduction that they received while they owned the property? If so, that is fair. If not, Bill C-240 might open a tax loophole for those who invest in real estate. That is something else that will have to be looked at in committee.

Given that we know that the price of housing is skyrocketing, a measure that would encourage investors to outbid everyone else does not seem optimal to us. However, in our opinion, all of this could be resolved in committee. This does not change the Bloc Québécois's support for Bill C-240 at second reading stage. In 2019, the special committee on the charitable sector in the other place concluded that the proposed measure in Bill C-240 was positive overall and recommended adopting it.

Once again, I want to thank the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for his bill and all his work as a parliamentarian. I also want to acknowledge Mr. Johnson's commitment and all the work he has done for this cause. I look forward to Bill C-240 being studied in depth in committee.

• (1750)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as was said earlier, we are here today to debate a private member's bill, Bill C-240, that really focuses on exempting real estate and private corporation shares from capital gains tax when the proceeds are donated to charities.

Private Members' Business

I have worked in charities for a good part of my life. I really appreciate and respect the profound work that these organizations do in our communities. Whether it be helping newcomers to Canada, which was the charity I was a part of for eight years of my life, whether it be helping people who are looking for opportunities in terms of employment, or whether it be organizations that support people who are struggling in ways so profound that we cannot imagine in this place, they do profound and important work. When I look at Bill C-240, I am a little disappointed. There is so much that could be done to support charities, but the bill would do such a small portion, and it would really allow the wealthy of this country more control of where their tax dollars end up while requiring other Canadians to make up the difference of that tax bill. I think that is something we need to reflect on.

We know that, across the country, the ultrarich are not paying their fair share. The top 1% earners across the country are not paying their fair share, and everybody else is. Everyday folks such as those across my riding of North Island—Powell River are paying their fair share.

In my riding, for example, I think of the Comox Valley Ukrainian Cultural Society. Its members are working so hard, because their family members across the sea are suffering profoundly. One of the things they are doing is having regular rallies. People are donating to the cause, and they are helping out in every way they can. Not too long ago, I was at an event. One of those incredible volunteers stood up and talked about their plan to cook perogies and some traditional food that they would sell to raise funds, because they wanted to make sure that they did all that they could.

I think of the Hardy Bay Senior Citizens' Society, whose members really do a lot of work. They work with over 200 people in the community, and they have a huge membership. They also support many people, such as by serving food to the elderly, especially during COVID. These folks were out there making sure that people who had any mobility issues got the supports they needed. They took food to their homes and supported them in every way they could.

I think of the North Island Seniors Housing Foundation. This organization is one that I am profoundly proud of and am actually a member of. What I know is true is that this federal government does not support housing for seniors, and rural and remote communities across this country are really struggling to keep seniors in their communities. Seniors are coming out and saying, "We need housing that will let us stay in our community where we have our social infrastructure, and where we have all the people we know here in the community who will help us." They do not want to be sent away, which is what is happening right now. We are seeing elderly people who, as they age, instead of staying in the warm companionship of their community, are being forced far away because that is where the accessible housing is. They lose all of those connections.

Private Members' Business

I think of the Campbellton Neighbourhood Association in my neighbourhood of Campbell River. It is doing profound work to make the community and that area more recognizable, acknowledging the history of it in our community and really showcasing the spectacular opportunities that are there. I also think of PRISMA in Port Hardy, which does amazing work in bringing international musicians to our region and really celebrating the beauty of music in our community.

When I look at the bill before us, it would not do what I would like it to. It really focuses on making sure that the ultrarich get another tax break. I do not know how many they need. I cannot believe that we are spending our time trying to find easier ways for them when we know how many people are suffering, especially with inflation. We know that people are looking for help. They are living paycheque to paycheque and are not able to get ahead. Even now, it is getting harder and harder for them. They are going to the places where there are food banks and where there are opportunities. We need to find ways to support those organizations.

The bill is a small one, and would not actually address those areas of concern across the country. Again, it would allow the very wealthy, who are able to give away a substantial amount, to decide what charities are valuable instead of really looking at what is happening across our country and making sure that the supports go where they are desperately needed. We know that half of the top 10 billionaires have foundations in their family name. That comes from Canadians for Tax Fairness.

• (1755)

Although charitable organizations perform valuable work, they are a poor replacement for adequately taxing the rich and can reduce tax revenues by more than they distribute. We need to look at this critically.

I will not be supporting this bill, and I hope we will have more meaningful discussions about how the people in this country and the charities that serve us so well get the supports they need to do the work they must do to support everyday Canadians.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-240, an act to amend the Income Tax Act.

I would like to first commend my colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for introducing this important bill in Parliament. I know my fellow Manitoban has done some tremendous work over his personal and professional life to improve his country. Bill C-240 is an addition to his great work. It is for those reasons that I am proud to call him my colleague and seatmate in the House of Commons.

Charities contribute immensely to the social, cultural and economic well-being of Canada. There are over 85,000 registered charities in Canada that collectively employ 2.4 million Canadians and contribute 8.4% of our nation's GDP. However, the reality is that charities have experienced some of the most devastating impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. When charities are hurting, so are Canadians.

In a previous debate, my colleague noted that Canadian charities lost \$10 billion during the pandemic alone. That is \$10 billion less

for the community foundations that improve the towns and cities we call home. It is \$10 billion less for the education charities that grow young minds and provide hope for a better future. It is \$10 billion less for the wildlife charities that lead critical research and deliver habitat conservation. It is \$10 billion less for the arts and cultural charities that fuel vibrant communities. It is \$10 billion less for the food banks that so many Canadians now depend on.

Now with a cost-of-living crisis sweeping across our country, I fear that charities will continue to suffer from the reduced disposable income available to Canadians. It was just yesterday when the Bank of Canada significantly raised interest rates in an attempt to control record inflation. When Canadians are paying significantly more in debt payments, they cannot afford to donate to local charities at the end of the day.

Canadian charities have filled many gaps in our society that government could not fill. I think of the Community Foundation of Swan Valley, which recently contributed to early learning centres in Swan River. I think of the Touchwood Park Association in Neepawa, which contributed immensely to providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities. I also think of the Dauphin & District Community Foundation, which continues to support recreational services in the parkland region. I could speak endlessly to the thousands of projects and initiatives that charities are responsible for in my constituency alone, but now is the time for the government to step up and support Canadian charities.

Bill C-240 would significantly help Canadian charities through a simple change to the Income Tax Act. Bill C-240 would amend the Income Tax Act to waive the capital gains tax on the proceeds from the arm's-length sale of privately owned shares or real estate when those proceeds are donated to a charity. This change would directly fuel a significant amount of new donations to Canadian charities year after year.

Imagine a local business owner, an accountant, for example. An accountant owns a practice in their local community, and after years of hard work, the accountant decides to retire and sell the business. The owner sells the business for a \$100,000 in profit and chooses to donate a portion of the sale to a favourite local charity.

Under the current Canadian legislation, the accountant would be subject to a significant tax on the profit of the sale. In this case, the accountant would have to pay a capital gains tax of \$25,000, assuming the absence of an exemption. This means the business owner would have \$25,000 less to donate to a local charity, and the government would have \$25,000 more to spend on who knows what.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-240 would eliminate this tax bill if the accountant decided to donate the proceeds to a Canadian charity. The accountant would then have a choice between sending the money to the government or donating the money to a Canadian charity. I hope we can all agree that money is better spent when it is used in our local communities, as opposed to being sucked away in the black hole of government.

The private sector can play a key role in supporting the work of charitable organizations, and Bill C-240 would enable it to do this. Too often, governments believe they have the answers to all of our problems, when in reality the citizens of our country are more than capable of addressing the needs of society.

● (1800)

The independent Parliamentary Budget Officer has reported that Bill C-240 would increase charitable donations by nearly \$1 billion over a period of five years. That is a significant number. Members of the House have an opportunity before them to forever increase donations to Canadian charities. I see no reason why they would oppose such a piece of legislation.

Thankfully, this concept is not a new one. Previous Liberal and Conservative governments have initiated great work on this idea. The capital gains tax on gifts of publicly traded securities to Canadian charities no longer exists because of government action. Bill C-240 attempts to further this initiative with the exemption for shares of private companies. I can assure members of the House that there are many business owners who would rather give their money to charity as opposed to the government if they had the choice to do that.

This bill would not incur any new government spending. It is simply taking the tax money that was on its way to the government's coffers and putting it into Canadian charities. As the PBO report showed, for every one dollar the government forgoes under Bill C-240, approximately \$1.26 goes to charity. This is a very noteworthy benefit.

As an MP who proudly represents a rural region, I would be remiss not to mention the particular importance of charities in rural Canada. Charities are the foundation to the well-being of small and rural communities. It is very common for Canadians living in small towns to contribute to multiple charitable organizations. The limited services available in rural and remote communities emphasize the important role that charities have in supporting the people within them.

Philanthropy is alive and well in rural Canada. Rural Canadians step up to help their neighbours and communities when needed. Charities turn this mentality into results. It is for reasons like this that I have no doubt Bill C-240 would have an amplified impact in rural Canada.

In conclusion, Bill C-240 would directly support more than 85,000 registered charities in Canada at a time when they need support the most. It would incentivize more Canadians to increase support for the charities of their choice.

There is a reason that so many high-profile charities and non-profit organizations have supported Bill C-240. I encourage mem-

bers of the House to speak directly with charities in their local ridings to hear what this bill means to them. If they do so, they will hear the stark realities that Canadian charities are facing and the importance of creating an environment that incentivizes more giving.

Once again, I would like to thank my colleague from Manitoba for introducing this important piece of legislation. I was proud to jointly second Bill C-240 and can assure him that I will be in voting in favour of this legislation. I encourage every other member of the House to do the same and send this bill to committee, where it can be further studied. As parliamentarians, I believe we should hear expert testimony on this legislation to better understand the positive impact it would have.

Canadian charities have supported so many of us in so many ways. It is time for us to support them. Bill C-240 would enable us to do that.

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to take part in today's second reading debate on private member's bill, Bill C-240. As we know, the bill would provide an exemption from capital gains tax in respect of donations to charities resulting from certain arm's-length dispositions of real estate or private corporation shares.

At the onset, I would like to make it clear that I support the intent of the bill, which is to say that I support and encourage the making of charitable donations. However, the bill is problematic in how it aims to achieve this.

First and foremost among my concerns is that the proposed measure in the bill is regressive. This means that it would primarily benefit a particularly small class of high-income individuals rather than encouraging charitable giving by the broader public. More specifically, it would disproportionately benefit those who are holding private corporation shares or real estate other than a principal residence, which is to say, higher-income Canadians. That makes the bill unfair and puts it at odds with our government's goal of cutting taxes for the middle class while raising them on the top 1%.

For example, we have increased support for families and low-income workers through programs such as the Canada child benefit and the Canada workers benefit, which have helped lift over one million Canadians out of poverty since 2015, including 435,000 children. We have also increased the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit for low-income single seniors and enhanced the GIS earnings exemption, and we are increasing old age security for Canadians aged 75 and older in July 2022.

Private Members' Business

We will continue to examine ways to improve the tax and benefit system to ensure that it is well targeted and fair. However, providing a tax break that disproportionately benefits the wealthy is not in keeping with this approach. What is more, the measure is poorly targeted at achieving the bill's goal of supporting charitable donations. The proposed measure could in fact result in a windfall gain to donors without actually increasing the amount of their charitable giving to charities. That is because donors could simply substitute their existing cash donations to charities with donations of private corporation shares and real estate in order to receive greater tax benefits.

Considering the significant flaws in this proposed legislation, it is important to bear in mind that the Government of Canada's tax support for charitable donations is already recognized as being among the most generous in the world. The primary mechanisms for delivering this tax support are the charitable donation tax credit for individuals and the charitable donation tax deduction for corporations.

For the 2019 tax year, individuals are estimated to have claimed over \$11 billion in such donations through this provision, with federal tax assistance on these donations amounting to approximately \$3 billion. At the same time, corporations are estimated to have donated \$3.1 billion through this provision, with federal tax assistance of approximately \$655 million.

In terms of the charitable donation tax credit for individuals, the tax assistance received through the CDTC more than offsets any paid tax on the income used to finance the donation for the vast majority of individuals who donate more than \$200 a year. The CDTC provides a 15% credit on the first \$200 of annual donations, and for most donors, the CDTC provides tax assistance at 29% on the portion of donations over \$200. What is more, donors with incomes subject to the 33% marginal rate can also claim a 33% credit on the portion of donations exceeding \$200 made from this income.

In addition to this federal tax assistance, all provinces and territories have charitable donation tax credits, with the average provincial credit being approximately 17%. In fact, total combined federal-provincial tax assistance averaged out to be around 46% on donations above \$200 in 2019. For donors with taxable income in excess of the highest rate, tax assistance on donations would be around 50% in most provinces and as high as 54% in Nova Scotia and Alberta.

• (1805)

Moreover, the government already offers special incentives to encourage donations of important assets such as publicly listed securities, ecologically sensitive land and certified cultural property through an exemption from capital gains tax for most such donations.

When the exemption from a capital gains tax is included, the total tax relief provided on such donations can be as high as 81% when provincial incentives are added. The charitable donation tax credit can generally be claimed up to 75% of the donor's net income in a year. Unused donations can be carried forward for up to five years, or up to 10 years in the case of ecologically sensitive land.

Unfortunately, Bill C-240 may actually undermine the effectiveness of the tax incentives provided under the ecological gift program. That is because currently the only type of real estate donation that is eligible for the full capital gains exemption is ecologically sensitive land that has been certified as such by Environment Canada and donated to certain qualified recipients to ensure conservation.

Under the proposed measure, this targeting of support to donations of ecologically sensitive land would be blown wide open. That is because under this proposal, donations of the proceeds of the disposition of real estate to any charity would receive the same tax assistance, and this could introduce a perverse incentive for potential donors to simply sell their land to a third party, like a real estate developer, and donate the proceeds to any charity thus avoiding the ecogift certification and valuation process. In short, it could result in a donor getting the same tax benefit from turning ecologically sensitive land into a parking lot as they would get from donating it to an entity that would preserve and protect it.

The measure is also expected to be costly. In February 2021, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that the cost of this measure to the federal government would be approximately \$778 million over five years. That is a lot of money to dedicate largely to wealthy Canadians at a time when we are working to rebuild from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting Bill C-240 would almost certainly increase the pressure on government to also provide special exemptions for donations of other types of property, such as virtual currency or cash gifts made after tax income.

Such tax changes would ideally be undertaken through the budget process, which enables the government to fully consider trade offs, balance priorities and undertake new fiscal commitments only to the extent that they are affordable. A private member's bill like Bill C-240 does not afford us that scope.

These serious shortcomings must be weighed against the generous and effective incentives for charitable giving that are already in place to encourage people to donate more to charities across Canada by reducing the after-tax cost of giving. Having done so, our government simply cannot lend its support to this private member's bill.

I am thankful for the opportunity to make that and my position clear on this issue.

• (1810)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to participate in this debate on Bill C-240. This bill will affect an important industry in Quebec, specifically non-profit organizations, or NPOs, and charities that we have all worked with as citizens and in our work as members.

We are all well aware of the important contribution they make to our communities. I commend the enormous amount of work that these organisations do every day in conditions that are not always easy. I thank them for it. I want to take a moment to commend the leadership of the team at Le Passage de l'Aurore hospice. It is important for every RCM in our region to have this kind of end-of-life facility.

Charities receive significant support, totalling nearly \$4 billion annually, through the tax system. Canada's tax incentives for charities are among the most generous in the world. Can we do even more in this area to help that sector thrive? I believe we can.

I also believe that piecemeal measures, which are often simplistic solutions, are no substitute for serious policy reform. In any case, it is high time that we prioritized the problems faced by NPOs and charities.

Tonight we will essentially debate a measure to exempt donations involving private shares and real estate from capital gains tax.

Let us review the history of this tax measure. Since 2006, the government has introduced a number of measures to boost charitable giving and cut red tape for the charitable sector. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance also studied the taxation of charities and NPOs, and this measure was among the recommendations in its February 11, 2013, report. This would benefit charities of all types, from hospitals, universities and cultural groups to the vast network of United Way-funded social service agencies across Quebec.

The measure was first introduced by the government in the 2015 budget. At that time, it was described as a way to unlock more private wealth for the public good. However, the exemption of donations involving private shares and real estate from capital gains tax was never implemented, as the Liberal members opposed it.

In 2019, the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector concluded that the measure proposed in Bill C-240 was positive overall and recommended that it be adopted. Did the pandemic finally manage to convince us that this sector of our economy is fragile and that action is urgently required?

There continues to be an urgent need to increase the financial resources of charities and NPOs. It is vital that we examine the real needs of charitable organizations and NPOs.

My criticism of this bill is that it once again avoids finding a comprehensive solution that would provide these organizations with greater predictability in the longer term. It does not address all the problems to identify potential solutions.

At first glance, I do not see any serious problems with this new provision. However, I want to stress that better social policies and an adequate response to the problems of an aging population must be implemented in conjunction with the modernization of our tax system for charities.

Social inequalities exist, and the government's declining contribution to health care has a lot to do with that. The Bloc Québécois wants the government to increase the main provincial transfer so the provinces can make long-term plans for providing services to their people. This is just basic respect for the Canada Health Act.

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Let us look at the changes proposed in the bill. Simply put, it would change the Income Tax Act to provide the same tax treatment as for donations of shares. Like other members of the House who commented on the consequences, I think we can look to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's numbers. That should not be far from the truth.

We have a report here from the PBO stating that donations of real estate and private corporation shares could rise from \$2.9 billion to \$3.9 billion, an increase of \$981 million.

I encourage my colleagues to look at part two of the Department of Finance's 2021 report on federal tax expenditures, and more specifically the table on page 33, which shows how much it costs the government for each of its existing measures for charities and non-profits.

I have a lot of questions that the finance committee could look into when studying the bill. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's budget model does not give any indication of how effective this measure is.

● (1815)

Are these new donations? Will this measure encourage more people to donate private corporation shares or real property? Would this simply add a benefit for donations that the organization would have received either way?

From a tax fairness perspective, tax credits for charitable donations are meant to recognize the public value of charities and to encourage donations. These tax credits are designed to encourage more donations, not to financially incentivize certain taxpayers to structure their affairs in a manner that minimizes their tax liability.

I think it is particularly important to ensure that this does not become an excuse for the government to shirk its social responsibilities.

We must not lose sight of technological change. That is hard for someone to do when they cannot afford it. My colleague from Joliette gave us his perspective on what we have heard from charities, as he has met with representatives from that sector of the economy.

As part of my role in the Bloc Québécois, what I have been hearing in my meetings is that the resources for organizations are limited, and that this is hindering the adoption of digital technologies, including software, hardware and data. As well, organizations are not always able to hire or train the required staff.

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However, not-for-profit organizations are key partners in the delivery of services to ensure the health and well-being of our community. Without access to critical technology such as computers, teleconferencing platforms, or a stable broadband connection, the ability of organizations to reach and serve their communities remains limited.

This reality was laid bare by the pandemic and restrictions on the ability to deliver programs in person. When it comes to the day-to-day needs of charities, they will need to be able to gain access to new technologies to help them with their work and to keep up with the demands that come with the digital age.

In closing, with the COVID-19 pandemic, I would say that charities, especially those providing vital services to vulnerable individuals and communities, began expressing more directly what they needed from governments to survive and continue their work. Non-profit organizations have played a critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic, but many are experiencing financial losses and facing increased demand for services. They need help to be able to continue providing critical programs and services.

Once again, we too often see the government disengaging from its mandates. In many cases, when we talk about people's needs, especially in the charitable sector, it should be the government's responsibility to provide the services that people need. Instead, they have to turn to a sector that often has fewer resources. In the end, it is the people in the various communities who suffer. I therefore encourage everyone to be generous, because that is a win-win for everyone in our society.

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today to speak on this important bill from my great colleague.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit Canadian charities extremely hard. Today I am happy to stand in the House and discuss a measure that would see the potential for a new revenue stream for our struggling charities across the country. Amending the Income Tax Act to provide an exemption from capital gains tax in respect of certain arm's-length dispositions of either real estate or private corporation shares to charities is an extremely important measure to see implemented. The bill would see to it that the proceeds of any arm's-length sale would qualify for exemption if donated within 30 days of disposition. The value is, of course, determined in the market by the sale and is not determined by the seller.

Each of us in the House has a charity, or in fact several, that would be near and dear to our own hearts. About 10 years ago, I created a not-for-profit organization called The Josie Foundation. That is one that is very near and dear to my heart, along with so many others. It is important that we understand just how difficult it was for charities to raise funds as they normally would because of the pandemic and the strain that it put on charitable organizations.

The importance of charitable organizations in Canada is without question, and we want to remind all people of the importance of volunteerism. Many hard-working Canadians volunteer their time. They get on the charities that are near and dear to their hearts and

whatever charity they are working on benefits our country in a great way. All members of the House and every political party in Canada inside these walls would agree that we must do anything we can to help charities. This bill would increase the amount of charitable giving by incentivizing donations through this tax measure. Again, Canadian charities need all the help they can get right now.

I will note that this measure was proposed in the 2015 budget by the Stephen Harper government, but in the 2016 budget, it was confirmed that the Liberal government did not intend to proceed with this measure. With this bill, we are trying to address the downturn in charitable giving that has been a trend for a while and was exacerbated during the pandemic. COVID-19 has had a massive impact on the charitable sector with the inability to raise funds at events, as well as donors being less likely to donate because they were personally struggling financially. When we add the concept of inflation to the mess and the problems charities are having raising funds, there is a really poor situation for the charities in this country.

With inflation running rampant, the financial struggles to Canadians are rising. In turn, this is putting more pressure on household disposable income, which is driving down available donation revenue. It should be noted that the charitable sector represents \$151 billion, or 8.1% of Canada's GDP. Currently, the Income Tax Act allows for this tax treatment for the proceeds of the sale of publicly traded shares. This bill would provide similar tax treatment for the sale of private shares and real estate. The Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector recommended the government implement this measure as a pilot project in June 2019 in its "Catalyst for Change" report, recommendation 34.

People at home and potentially people in the chamber are wondering whether the bill seems to disproportionately favour those who are high-income earners. The answer is that it is important to note that not a single donated dollar remains in the hands of the donor. Each dollar benefits the charity that receives it. This bill would make these donations more affordable for donors, no matter what their income level is. It is very good for charitable organizations. Many small business people are not necessarily high-income earners, but would be incentivized to make donations if they did not have to pay the capital gains tax associated with the sale of their businesses.

As to whether the nature of the tax is regressive, this is something that could be ascertained through expert testimony at the finance committee if the bill were ever to pass. We know we have to pass this bill.

• (1825)

If this bill does not pass, the people in every charitable organization in the country are going to feel sad, but they are also going to feel ashamed. Government members and parliamentarians know that this is the type of bill that each of us can represent. It transcends partisanship. We can look at this bill and each of us can understand how important it is for us to help this sector.

Another question that people might have is how the benefit flows from the tax incentive to the charity. When business owners decide that they wish to sell shares in their businesses, under this bill, proceeds from the sale of those privately held shares would qualify for a capital gains tax exemption if donated to a charity by the donor within 30 days of the close of the transaction. It is great news for charitable organizations. For the purpose of clarity, the shares of the donor's company could not be donated, but rather the proceeds derived from the sale of those shares could be donated. This mechanism helps avoid any valuation ambiguity, as the sale must be an arm's-length sale for the purpose of value.

Some may wonder how often people gift shares and how often people gift real estate, in particular outside of a will. The bill would not incentivize gifting private company shares or real estate. Rather, it would incentivize the donation of the sale proceeds derived from the sale of private company shares or real estate. One example is important as it pertains to real estate. Someone who invested in a small apartment building or a duplex several years ago is now retiring and decides to sell the place. Currently, when they sell, they will be required to pay capital gains tax, which would be roughly the equivalent of 25% of the increase in value of the property during the period of time it was owned. Under Bill C-240, those proceeds could be donated, in their entirety or in part, to a charity of the donor's choice and the donor would receive an exemption from the tax. In the end, we would incentivize somebody to be more charitable in our country, which would benefit charitable organizations.

Some might ask about the benefit to cost that is associated with this legislation. Someone correctly pointed out that a Library of Parliament report references two different types of tax costs. The first is the tax cost related to the forgone capital gains taxes. As I mentioned earlier, this equates to roughly 25% of the actual gain. The second cost is the cost due to behavioural change, as the goal of the bill is to increase charitable giving. Additional charitable tax receipts would also be issued. This is a win-win all day for charitable organizations, for the people who benefit from the great work of charitable organizations and for our great country when we put forth legislation such as this that would actually make a real difference in our society.

The federal tax costs related to the issuance of tax receipts may vary based on the amount of the contribution and individual income, but my understanding is that the cost is roughly 25% to 30% of the contribution. This, too, could be clarified by testimony.

I want to thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to bring forth this insightful commentary. I would be happy to meet with any members of the House, but I want to say again that Bill C-240, sponsored by my great friend from Winnipeg, is the type of bill that every political party can be proud of and that every member of the

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House can support. They are not supporting a political party here. They are supporting every charitable organization in this country, and we will proudly take all of their support. We need it. This is good for Canadians.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: Continuing debate. I see no other interventions, so I recognize the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley with his five-minute right of reply.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I would just like to say I am sorry I cannot be there in person to speak to the bill I have introduced, but I want to thank every single member of Parliament who has spent so much time studying this bill and making arguments. I realize that there are many positive arguments and there are some questions around the bill. That is why I think it is very important that a bill that could have such a profound effect on charities across the country be studied in committee.

When I say “charities”, I want to be clear that I am talking not just about charities; I am talking about the people who these charities serve, and what I have been saying throughout this whole process is that when charities are hurting, real people are hurting. This bill can help charities get back on their feet and help Canadians get back on their feet.

The idea of the bill came from Mr. Don Johnson, who I am sure many of the members listening know has been advocating for this. He advocated the tax change that led to the exemption for publicly traded securities, and he has advocated this change. I worked with him very closely.

I have to say there is broad stakeholder support also, and I ask every member to consider what institutions in their own ridings could benefit in a great way from this change. I know Imagine Canada has endorsed the bill, as have Diabetes Canada, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Special Olympics. Many charities have endorsed this bill, because they are in a situation right now where they have been affected in two ways. It is kind of a double whammy, when it comes to charities. They were hurt tremendously during the pandemic, and now the cost of living crisis is making it almost unaffordable for people to make contributions to charities.

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With this bill, I do not need to go through the numbers. They have been reiterated in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. Everybody is aware of them, but the reality is that the amount of money donated to charities would exceed the cost to the government in all cases. I disagree with a fact one of the members from the Liberal bench said: that this was just a tax break for the wealthy, or something to that effect. Most small business people are not wealthy people. Some people just own a duplex or a small apartment building. It does not make them wealthy.

This bill highly incentivizes charitable giving at a very efficient tax cost to the government. It is not a new idea. It piggybacks on the concept of the donation of publicly traded securities. It was introduced in 2015 in the budget, which passed. All I am really asking is that we not let this bill die here. I am just asking that we let it go to committee, bring expert testimony and ask all the questions that have been asked in the House.

If members who have reservations about the bill are still concerned about it when it comes back to the House, they can vote against it then, but I do not think it would be fair to the people who would benefit from this bill to essentially kill it right here, when it comes up for a vote next week. I really do not.

This bill deserves the attention of the finance committee. It was, as some of my colleagues have mentioned, a recommendation in the Senate report on charities just a few years ago. It is an idea that is worth every member's consideration in the House.

I just want to say, on the issue of regressivity, that it is also another issue that could be debated at committee. I personally do not think it is regressive, because the reality is that whoever is making these donations does not get to keep any of the money. Every single dollar would go to charity, so I do not know how someone, whether they are wealthy or not, when they are parting with every single dollar, is being benefited other than that they are being incentivized to give.

Those are my general comments. I want to again thank everybody for their serious consideration and thought on this bill. I ask members to please vote for it.

With that, I would like to ask for a recorded vote.

• (1835)

The Deputy Speaker: We will wait for a second here.

The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be readopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that there be a recorded vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 8, 2022, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are united in their support for Ukraine and their condemnation of the horrific and appalling illegal war and genocide being perpetrated against Ukrainians by Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation. Canadians want Canada to support Ukraine and Ukrainians. Canadians want their government to act, and time and again it has promised to act. It has promised to sanction Putin and the oligarchs. It has said all the right things about backing Ukraine. The government has once again made grand announcements about supporting Ukrainians fleeing the war and seeking refuge in Canada. However, like so many other pronouncements the government makes when it comes to support for Ukraine and Ukrainians, it is missing the mark.

For three months my fellow New Democrats and I have been calling on the government to impose sanctions on Putin and the Russian oligarchs who are financing this illegal war, yet we know now that, while the Prime Minister was making these announcements, millions of dollars were being diverted. Millions of dollars that should have gone to Ukraine and used to support Ukrainians settling in Canada was taken away from the country.

The government has missed the mark when it comes to humanitarian support. From the beginning of this illegal war, I have called on it to commit to working with Canadian organizations already on the ground, organizations that have the connections and experience to ensure that our humanitarian response is effective. Canadian organizations such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Canada-Ukraine Foundation have to do their own work. They have to fundraise separately to get humanitarian aid where it needs to go in Ukraine.

Now, once again, when it comes to supporting Ukrainians fleeing the war, we now have yet another example of the government making big promises while again missing the mark. The Ukrainians fleeing this war are incredibly vulnerable and deeply traumatized. I met with many Ukrainians fleeing the war in Ukraine when I travelled to Poland and the border towns. What I saw was heartbreaking.

I could not help but think of my parents, my children and myself in those situations when I saw those who were fleeing that violence. They are seniors, children, women, and mothers who are trying to find a safe haven for their children. They need housing, health care, child care, financial support, social supports, and to know that they will be safe and secure for the long term. Instead of providing these things, instead of living up to those promises, the government is providing work permits, work permits for seniors and women who cannot leave their children. The problem here is that the government either does not understand the issue or does not want to understand the issue.

These refugees are refugees from conflict and need to be treated as such. They need to be named as refugees. They need to receive housing, financial support, and a path to permanent residency and citizenship if that is what they desire. Refugee status would give Ukrainians the chance to actually find refuge in Canada, but the current government is not granting them that status. Why not? It is because, if it acknowledges that these women and children are refugees, it would be obligated to support them, so instead the Liberals pretend. They pretend that Canada is giving refuge to these beleaguered and traumatized women and children. They pretend that Canada is living up to its promises. The Liberals pretend to care, and this is sickening me. It is time they stop pretending.

Will the government finally commit to providing real support for Ukrainian refugees?

• (1840)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to respond to the hon. member's questions because I do not need to pretend we care. We do care. Canada is firm in its support of Ukraine.

Ukrainian immigrants are an important part of Canada's cultural history, and we continue to support the courageous people of Ukraine. As part of our commitment to support those fleeing Russia's unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine, our government has put in place immigration measures to help Ukrainians fleeing the war find safe haven here in Canada.

The Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel program is an accelerated temporary residence pathway that is designed to help Ukrainians who are seeking safe haven in Canada while the war in their home country continues. Between March 17 and May 25 of this year, IRCC received just over 259,000 CUAET applications, of which more than 120,000 have been approved. As well, between January 1 and May 22, more than 35,455 Ukrainian citizens arrived in Canada at our land and airports of entry. These arrival statistics cover all Ukrainian passport holders, including returning Canadian permanent residents of Ukrainian origin.

On April 9 of this year, the Prime Minister announced a series of additional measures to help Ukrainians find a safe haven in Canada. Working closely with our partners, including provinces and territories, settlement organizations, and NGOs across the country, we have implemented these key support measures. While Ukrainians are not coming to Canada as refugees, we are working hard to make sure that they have the travel support, transitional financial assistance and settlement services they need so they can come to Canada and thrive in their communities.

I am extremely pleased to announce that the third federal charter flight, which was carrying 319 Ukrainians, arrived moments ago in Halifax. This is in addition to the two other federal charter flights, one to Winnipeg on May 23 and one to Montreal on May 29. We have had the great honour and pleasure of welcoming Ukrainians in our communities. We have helped more than 900 Ukrainians travel to Canada.

These charters were available to Ukrainian nationals and their family members who are approved through the Canada-Ukraine au-

thorization for emergency travel program. As well, those arriving on the charter flights who do not have suitable arrangements have been provided with temporary accommodations for up to 14 nights. In the coming weeks, we expect to expand the measures to include Ukrainians who arrive under the CUAET programs in other Canadian cities and who have no other confirmed accommodations.

We have also put in place the necessary supports so Ukrainians and their families can thrive in their new community after they arrive. Starting today, June 2, Ukrainians arriving in Canada under the CUAET program are also able to receive transitional financial assistance. The benefit, a direct one-time payment of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child 17 years and under, will help Ukrainians and their families meet their immediate and basic needs, such as transportation and long-term housing, as they settle in their new communities and look for work.

Ukrainians arriving under the CUAET program, as well as those who were already in Canada when the war broke out, are also receiving vital settlement program services, and these services include language training, enrolling children in school, and employment counselling and mentoring.

We will continue to be there for our Ukrainian community, and I am happy that I was able to answer the question.

• (1845)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, that did not answer the question. Frankly, I made it very clear in my question that it was not how many are coming here; it was about providing the support for them when they are here. This is basically the answer of thoughts and prayers. The government is so good at promising things and delivering absolutely nothing for the people who need them.

Canada's resettlement agencies and Ukrainian organizations in Canada have been raising the alarm for weeks now that we are headed towards a crisis unless the government changes course. Because Ukrainians are not considered refugees, they are arriving in Canada without access to the support networks that they need. The Ukrainian Canada Congress national president has noted that Canada is failing Ukrainians.

It does not have to be this way. The government could act today, right now, and make this right. It should not leave it up to donors. It should not leave it up to sponsored flights. The government should grant Ukrainians refugee status and give resettlement agencies and Ukrainian organizations the support and tools they need to assist Ukrainian refugees.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member again for her questions, because that allows me to tell her exactly what we are doing above and beyond what I have shared with her.

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When we talk about the services that we are going to continue to provide on March 30 of this year, we are also extending settlement program services, which actually are typically only available to permanent residents, to make them available until March 31 of next year. This will help with housing searches; language training; information about orientation to life in Canada, such as helping children enrol in school; information and services to help access the labour market, including mentoring, networking, counselling, skills development and training; activities that promote connection with communities; assessment of other needs Ukrainians may have; referral to appropriate agencies; and services targeting the needs of women, seniors, youth and LGBTQ.

We will continue to welcome Ukrainians seeking refuge from Putin's war as quickly and safely as possible.

SENIORS

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the chance to come back to a question I asked of the Prime Minister about a month or so ago.

I asked the question because it was on long-term care. Back in 2019, when I was knocking on doors in my community, I heard concerns from neighbour after neighbour, both those who had a parent in care and those who were caregivers, about the crisis they saw as a result of decades of underinvestment.

It is an example of how the pandemic really only made things worse, because if we fast-forward to 2021, we all know that the crisis in long-term care exploded in the pandemic.

In my community, for example—and I have shared this story in the House before—I will not forget anytime soon speaking with a woman who was sharing how her mom had been waiting in hospital for a bed in long-term care for three months. As she told this story, I could see the tears streaming down her face.

I also spoke with a personal support worker who shared, and she was being honest, that “I am not giving four hours of care a day; I am lucky if I am able to give four minutes of care a day.”

It is obvious that this crisis continues in long-term care, and we are not out of the woods yet. In fact, in the most recent numbers I have available on the wait times for long-term care, in the summer of 2021 there were still 52,000 people on the wait-list.

Last year, we heard in the Liberal platform and from the Prime Minister himself that billions of dollars were being promised for long-term care. He shared the words that nothing was off the table when it comes to addressing the crisis in long-term care, but if we fast-forward to what was in the budget, and I looked right through it, long-term care was only mentioned once, and when it was mentioned, it was only about funds that were previously allocated.

There was also no mention of the safe long-term care act, despite this being part of the agreement between the NDP and the Liberals, one of the few really key new items.

This is what prompted my question to the Prime Minister at the time and my continued concern when it comes to addressing the crisis.

To offer some ideas on what could be done, we need look no further than what the former member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Paul Manly, had proposed in Motion No. 77. He proposed eliminating the wait times; paying long-term care staff adequately for their work, and providing benefits and paid sick leave; implementing a basic care guarantee that would ensure that we have a minimum of four hours of regulated personal care per day for every resident; taking the profit out of long-term care and transitioning long-term care facilities to non-profit and co-operative management structures; and introducing a safe long-term care act modelled after the Canada Health Act to be sure that it establishes national standards for care and staffing.

In the Prime Minister's response, he shared that the government is working with provinces and territories.

Tonight, for the parliamentary secretary, I have three questions I would love to hear more about.

First of all, does he and the governing party recognize that the crisis in long-term care continues?

Second, when, specifically, will the governing party follow through on what they have already promised: tabling the safe long-term care act?

Finally, if he can provide an update as to whether work is being done with provinces and territories, exactly what work is being done?

● (1850)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend and colleague from Kitchener Centre for his work on this file and his dedication to seniors living in his riding and across the country.

Many seniors have faced significant health, economic and social challenges due to COVID-19, which has really laid bare the systematic challenges in Canada's long-term care system. As soon as COVID-19 exposed some of these challenges in our long-term care system, our government was there to help the provinces and territories with additional PPE, with the armed forces in the long-term care facilities in Quebec and Ontario and with much more.

Our government has also stressed the need for permanent, long-term solutions for long-term care facilities so that the Canadians living and working in them are safe and treated with respect and dignity. Key to achieving that level of safety and comfort are national standards for long-term care.

I would remind the member opposite that in March 2021, the Standards Council of Canada, which is a federal Crown corporation, the Health Standards Organization and the Canadian Standards Association announced that they would be collaborating on the development of two new complementary federal long-term care standards. That was a result of work from our government. Their collaboration with stakeholders across the country has focused on addressing the delivery of safe, reliable and high-quality long-term care services, the design and operation of long-term care homes, and infection prevention and control practices in long-term care.

For HSO's standard, this means resident-centred care practices: a respectful team-based environment, a healthy, competent and resilient workforce with healthy working conditions, and strong governance practices and operations. For the CSA group standard, this means cleaning and disinfecting processes, waste removal, HVAC, plumbing, medical gas systems and the use of more modern technology in care systems. We expect that the final release of those standards will be done at the end of this year. Budget 2021 also included a \$3-billion investment to support the provinces and territories in their efforts to apply these standards and ensure permanent changes are made.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight the challenges in long-term care, including gaps in infection prevention and staffing. I believe that answers the first question my colleague asked, which was whether we recognize that this crisis is continuing. The answer is yes. Our government has made significant investments, including \$4 billion to help the provinces and territories improve the standards of care in those facilities. In addition to that, there is \$41.9 billion in cash supports to the provinces and territories through the Canada health transfer.

Canadians can rest assured that we will keep working hard with the provinces and territories so we can fight COVID-19 together. That includes in our long-term care facilities.

On the campaign, we also committed to investing an additional \$25 billion over five years to better support the health care system and provide better mental health services across the country for seniors. The provinces and territories will now receive over \$47 billion through the Canada health transfer in 2021 and 2022, with the territories getting \$500 million, to help them prepare for outbreaks of COVID-19. To date, our government has spent more than eight dollars out of every \$10 in this country to fight the pandemic.

There were a couple of other questions. When will the tabling of the safe long-term care act commence? I believe that work is under way. We are working expeditiously on that because it is a priority for this government. I do not have any updates on work with the provinces, but I look forward to the next round of questions from my friend and colleague from Kitchener Centre.

• (1855)

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary not just for his kind words, but for actually answering the questions that were offered this evening. I think a respectful approach and a discourse that feels exactly like that are what we should see more of in this place.

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I understand that he might not be able to share more about when the safe long-term care act would be introduced, so I wonder, with this final bit of time we have available, if he could share his reflections on why no new funds were allocated in the most recent budget, recognizing there is a crisis we are still in. Is there more specificity he can offer for what would be in the safe long-term care act? What can all parliamentarians do to advance it more quickly, recognizing that a crisis requires urgent action?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, while I know that it is challenging for Green members to appear at committee, I would invite the member to the health committee at some point. Work is under way. We have been addressing human resources in health care, which is related to this challenge. I would also highlight what I said in a previous round, which is that we are investing \$3 billion through budget 2021 to ensure that standards for long-term care are applied and that permanent changes are made.

We all agree that people living and working in long-term care deserve to be treated with respect and dignity in a safe environment. Our government has invested in immediate solutions while supporting efforts to permanently correct what needs correcting in the long-term care system, not only to better protect against a future pandemic, but to make every single day a day of safety and good living.

We owe this to our seniors in the country. They built this country. We are grateful for this country. It is a great place to live, and we owe them a life of dignity and respect. That is what we are achieving together by collaborating in this place.

TAXATION

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the adjournment debate tonight to address concerns raised by constituents in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap and shared by Canadians across the country regarding the government's continuing attacks on manufacturing jobs and the tourism sector.

The government was asked if the finance minister understands that her high-tax regime will do nothing but kill jobs in the manufacturing and tourism sectors, and the response was, frankly, unacceptable. In his response to the question, the parliamentary secretary stated, "to make sure that we have the resources needed to invest in Canadians and help our economy continue to recover from the pandemic, we are ensuring that the wealthiest pay their fair share." This shows just how out of touch this government is with reality. The Liberals do not realize that their tax-and-spend policies are killing jobs in small businesses and tourism sectors.

Adjournment Proceedings

The government did not do an impact analysis of its proposed new surtax before it proposed the surtax on vehicles, vessels and aircraft. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer did undertake such analysis, and he concluded that the proposed new surtax will result in over \$2.8 billion in lost sales over the next five years, a 15% reduction, which will devastate Canada's car manufacturing sector, boating sector and aerospace sector.

It is not the wealthy who are going to pay for this tax policy; it is the workers in the plants no longer building these products and the rental and charter companies that do not have new vessels coming into their rental fleets. This new surtax will cost Canadian workers in Canada's tourism sector and peripheral sectors and supply chains whose jobs are being put at risk. These are the people who will pay for this government's damaging and short-sighted legislation.

As Canadian workers break free from the stranglehold of the pandemic and businesses struggle to recover, only the Liberals would conceive that imposing such a tax on sales that support good manufacturing jobs right here in Canada is the right path forward. This surtax will drive jobs and contracts out of Canada and make purchases more expensive for Canadians, because the new surtax will not just tax specified items, but it will also tax the sales tax on the purchase, another tax on tax by this government.

Many charter vessel fleet operators rely on individual purchasers to invest in new vessels to renew their fleets and sustain standards that will attract tourists from across Canada and around the world. If those vessels are not renewed and up to standard, customers from here in Canada and abroad will take their money elsewhere, the U.S. for example, and support tourism, jobs and incomes there.

The resultant loss of investment, plus the spinoff loss of rental, tourism and service revenues, will far outweigh any benefits the government thinks it will rake in from this new tax. The government and its new surtax will hurt Canadians who need the jobs the most as Canada recovers and tries to dig itself out of the debt hole of the government's reckless spending abandon.

I want to know, and Canadians want to know, this: How can the government be so callous and continue to force this new surtax through Parliament to inflict harm on hard-working Canadians?

• (1900)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from North Okanagan—Shuswap for raising this question of the luxury tax this evening in adjournment debate. As we all know, taxes help pay for the government programs and services that all Canadians depend upon, and they provide a social safety net on which all Canadians can rely. The usefulness of this social safety net was very obvious during the pandemic.

While many Canadians have sacrificed a lot to keep our economy going through the pandemic, we also know that some of the wealthiest have done quite well. We believe that it is only fair to ask those who can afford to buy luxury goods to contribute a little bit more. That is why the government followed through on its commitment to introduce a tax on select luxury goods in budget 2021.

Our government proposed in budget 2021 the introduction of a tax on the sale of new luxury cars and aircraft with a retail price of over \$100,000 and on new boats over \$250,000. It is estimated that by this measure we will increase federal revenues by \$654 million over five years starting in 2021-22. I would like to reassure my colleagues that the luxury tax only applies to boats above a quarter of a million dollars and has an effective rate less than 10% for boats less than \$500,000.

I think we should also all be mindful that the \$250,000 price threshold is 3.3 times the median household income in Canada before taxes. We also have seen recent reports the demand for luxury goods is strong and has continued throughout the pandemic. We are definitely not targeting middle-class Canadians with this measure. We are simply asking those who can buy these luxury goods to make an additional contribution.

I understand that my hon. colleague is concerned that the luxury tax will negatively impact the tourism industry in his region. However, I would like to reassure him that families that are renting or chartering new houseboats in the Shuswap region would only bear a very small portion of this tax, as it would be spread out over all the charters over the useful life of the houseboat.

Finally, the government is not implementing this new tax alone or blindly. Canadians have been consulted about it, and the draft legislative proposals were released in March of this year. Subject to parliamentary approval, this tax would come into effect on September 1, 2022.

I look forward to following up with my hon. colleague if he has any further questions or comments.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, it is clear from this answer that the member does not understand, and his government does not understand, that it is not the wealthy who are going to be suffering the implications of this tax. It is the jobs that are going to be lost because of the loss of sales.

Some \$2.8 billion in lost sales is what the Parliamentary Budget Officer has identified will be the loss directly from this proposed tax. It just shows that the government has not looked at the final numbers to understand what it is going to do for job creation and job continuity in the country.

I hope that the member can do better in his one-minute response now than he did in his previous response.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, I will do my best. I would like to conclude by reminding my colleagues and the hon. member that this government has been there to support Canadians as we navigated through the pandemic and taxes are necessary to pay for the social programs that Canadians depend upon. We believe that it is only fair that those who can afford vessels worth more than \$250,000 contribute a little bit more than others.

In conclusion, I would just state that previous Conservative governments recognized that taxes are what pay for the government programs that are essential for Canadians, particularly vulnerable Canadians. As I have said many times in the House, I grew up in social housing. I grew up in a co-op, and those co-ops would not have existed if it were not for good tax structures similar to the ones that the Mulroney government brought forward with the GST. We would not be here today without that good Conservative idea of the general sales tax.

In closing, I would like to thank former prime minister Brian Mulroney for bringing forward the GST, and we are following up with this luxury tax because Canadians rely on these services more than ever.

● (1905)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:06 p.m.)

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