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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, December 11, 2023

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[*English*]

PROTECTING YOUNG PERSONS FROM EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY ACT

The House resumed from November 23 consideration of the motion that Bill S-210, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit material, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to address the many different types of issues on the floor of the House, and today we do that through Bill S-210.

The title of the legislation, protecting young persons from exposure to pornography act, sends a fairly powerful message. There is absolutely no doubt about that. When I think about the community I represent and the experiences I have had as a parliamentarian over the years with regard to this very sensitive issue, I suggest that it goes beyond pornography. What we are really talking about is the safety of our children.

We all have serious concerns with how the Internet has evolved, with access to the Internet and with what our young people are seeing on the Internet. I believe there is an onus and responsibility on all of us in that respect, not only at the national level but also at the provincial level. Even in our school system, we all have a sense of responsibility, not to mention the parents and guardians of children. We all have a very important role in recognizing that which quite often causes harm to the minds of our children, either directly or indirectly, and the impact it has, putting a child on a specific course in life.

I do not say that lightly. When I look at the legislation and think of the intimate images on the Internet, all I need to do is look at some of the streaming services, whether it is Netflix, Crave or the many others out there. I suspect that if we were to apply what is being suggested in this legislation, it could prove to be somewhat

problematic. I do not know to what degree the sponsor of the bill has thought through the legislation itself. The title is great. The concern is serious. We are all concerned about it. However, when I think of the impact that this has on our children, I believe it is not just through pornography. Cyber-bullying is very real. We often hear of very tragic stories where a young person is bullied through the Internet.

We need a holistic approach to what we can do as legislators to protect the best interests of children. In looking at the legislation, there seems to be a mix of criminal and administrative law. On the one hand we are saying it is illegal, giving the impression that criminal law needs to deal with it, yet there is an administrative penalty being applied if someone has fallen offside. I see that as a bit of an issue that needs to be resolved.

However, the biggest issue we need to look at is why the bill is fairly narrow in its application with respect to harms to children. I used the example of cyber-bullying. It seems to me that the department has been very proactive and busy on a number of fronts, whether it is with the online news legislation or other legislation. I know departments are currently in the process of looking at legislation to bring forward in the new year that would have a more holistic approach to dealing with things that impact or harm young people. I suspect that through the departments, with the amount of consultation that has been done and continues to be done on the issue, we will see more solid legislation being provided.

• (1105)

In the legislation being proposed, issues arise, such as concerns dealing with the Privacy Commissioner. It is easy for us to say we want to ensure that young people watching these programs are at the age of majority. It is a difficult thing to ultimately administer. I am not aware of a country that has been successful at doing so. I am not convinced that the legislation being proposed would be successful at doing that.

Private Members' Business

In terms of the age of majority, I was citing earlier today how things can be very easily manipulated, such as by using VPN technology, which I must say I am not familiar with. Someone could be at their house and could somehow change their location to give the perception that instead of being in one community or neighbourhood, they are someplace thousands of miles away. There is also the whole idea of using identification that is not necessarily theirs. I will cite the example of teenagers being among friends when it comes time to get alcohol. False identification is often used or encouraged in certain areas by teenagers to acquire alcohol. To believe that there would not be any manipulation of the system would be wrong. Imagine a person getting information that then gets submitted as data points for a company and how harmful misinformation would be to the individual who has that identification.

To what degree has this legislation been worked on with the Privacy Commissioner? I suspect that the Privacy Commissioner might have something to say about the legislation. The difficulty that I have is in the name, Bill S-210, protecting young persons from exposure to pornography act. I believe that each and every one of us here today would understand that pornography for minors is not a good thing. It does have an impact.

I remember taking a course in sociology many years ago at university, and a test group was put to the side. One part of the test group had to watch hours and hours of pornography, and in the other group it did not occur. The groups were then brought together and the consequence was striking. The group that watched pornography was more open, to the degree that they did not think certain offences and the inappropriate treatment between sexual partners were all that bad.

• (1110)

This has an impact in a very real way. I understand the concern, but we should be broadening the concern to include things like cyber-bullying. We need to leave it to the department to bring forward more comprehensive and substantive legislation that would take out some of the conflicts and deal with issues from the Privacy Commissioner. It would ultimately be better for all of us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be here this morning to discuss a very important subject.

The law that limits young people's online access to sexually explicit material, more commonly known as pornography, is something we should be concerned about.

When we look at certain aspects of the bill, we see that things changed with the advent of information technology. Things are not like they used to be. It is no longer the same. We must have a slightly different concern for that reason.

We want—

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I know this subject matter is very important and very passionate. However, I would remind members that if they want to have side conversations, they should take them outside.

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, Bill S-210 would create an offence for organizations that make such content accessible. Obviously, we are motivated by the desire to better regulate sexually explicit material. Basically, what we want to do here is protect young people from a certain type of danger. When we seek to protect, we want to act proactively to prevent a certain event from happening, and the danger is being at the mercy of someone or something. We need to be very careful.

It is much easier then it used to be to gain access to pornography. I remember, when I was young, that people really had to be quite clever to find anything at all, and then it had to be hidden under the bed. I am not talking about myself, obviously, I am referring to others. Today, it is easy to get the material online. The web means everywhere and forever. It is very difficult to regulate online content.

In philosophy, it is said that in order to exist, an event must have two characteristics, space and time. Something takes place at a given time. We are used to thinking this way. Where and when? But the Internet is everywhere and forever. This makes it hard to control certain types of content or the businesses that provide it. Without space and time, nothing would exist. I used to ask the following question in discussions: What would happen to a bird in flight if there were neither space nor time? Most people answered that the bird would fall, but it would not, because there would be no time. These are basic building blocks of where we are.

When we talk about young people, we are talking about individuals who have not yet necessarily had an opportunity to develop judgment. They are very susceptible to various influences. They can easily form a false idea of the nature of sexuality, love and relationships, a distorted idea that could significantly shape their behaviour. This is a danger. As parliamentarians, no one here can be against preventing such a danger.

At the age when the concepts of love, sexuality, relationships and dating are still fluid, we have to be able to act preventively. There is a Creole saying I really like. It says, "the sun sleeps, but danger never does".

That is why we must act. I will reiterate that all action is time sensitive. If we must act, we must do so now. Of course, as we send the bill on to the next step, there will be discussions about what form it might take, but we must never lose sight of its intent. The intent must remain, because it reflects the values underlying it. Values are elements that embody a certain vision of goodness, justice and injustice. They are values like respect. We all demand respect, but sometimes we do not bother to learn what it is. Respect is a second look we take at something or someone so as not to offend needlessly. There is then something here we have to think about now.

This said, I have a bit of a problem with the idea of “now”, because, if it is urgent, we have to act. Last Friday, we lost a parliamentary day to useless procedural tactics that delayed the hearing and potentially the implementation of such a bill. We were confronted with a shameful partisan stunt that twisted procedure for purposes other than those intended. This is called manipulation. Manipulation is to use something for other purposes, for one's own ends.

● (1115)

While we were voting, the people who forced the vote were forgetting that there was a danger. There was a danger, yet I am told that the party that forced the vote was okay with the danger.

In the bill, although it is not referred to explicitly, we can read between the lines and understand that self-regulation will not be an option. Of course, as far as the Internet is concerned, self-regulation is a fiction. In general, online companies, especially the ones that distribute pornography, are not at all trustworthy, and trust is a condition for self-regulation. Trust is the ability to rely on others without having to control everything. Self-regulation is therefore neither credible nor acceptable.

In conclusion, I will ask my colleagues to stop wasting time, something we are seeing a lot of, and bear in mind that every hour of time lost is an opportunity for something to go wrong. As I said, there is danger, there is a threat, there are young people involved whose minds are not yet fully formed. We have to act now.

● (1120)

[English]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Internet is an amazing tool. It is fast, powerful, readily accessible to all and inexpensive. Economically, socially and culturally, it has levelled the playing field so anybody and everybody can be their own publisher, their own printer and their own marketing agent. They can even be aspiring musicians or artists without the need for an intermediary like a publishing company, a printing house, a record label or an agent. The Internet is the great democratizing tool of our generation, not unlike the Gutenberg printing press was 500 years ago in Europe, which changed the face of Europe, broke apart medieval culture and presented the Europe we recognize today.

Just like the printing press was used for good like printing the Bible in mass quantities in many languages, it was also used for evil like spreading lies about people and defaming their reputations. In that way, the Internet too is used for good. I have given some examples of that already, but it is also used for ill like spreading lies about people and defaming their reputation, so maybe things have not really changed all that much. Indeed human nature has not changed, but our tools have become more powerful so the ill we can do with our tools is just so much more pervasive.

One of these evils I am talking about is the danger of pornography and how the Internet has made it readily available to the whole world. Today we are thinking about children who also have access to pornography on the Internet.

Today we are talking about Bill S-210, an act that would restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit material. This is a

Private Members' Business

private member's bill that originated at the other place by Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne. In this House, in a rare show of non-partisanship, it has seconders from members of all parties in the House. At least I think that is correct. I know it has strong support in my caucus.

I want to thank the senator for sponsoring this important initiative, and I congratulate her on her determination and for bringing it to this point despite numerous delays and resistance from vested interests.

What would Bill S-210 do?

The summary of the bill reads as follows:

This enactment makes it an offence for organizations to make sexually explicit material available to young persons on the Internet.

Why is that necessary? What is the problem trying to be resolved here? I did my own research, on the Internet, free of charge, and found an article published by *Psychology Today*, which is a recognized and respected publication. This is what the article had to say about pornography and children:

A far cry from looking at a sensual magazine centerfold, today's adolescents are viewing online pornographic videos with motions and sounds, depicting every potential sexual act that can be imagined. The internet, which has been called the “Triple-A Engine” due to its affordability, accessibility, and anonymity...has dramatically changed the pornography industry; yet its effects on adolescents' development is still unfolding.

Senator Miville-Dechêne did a lot of research on this topic, as evidenced by her very thoughtful speech in the Senate a few years ago. It has been a long and winding road for her to get it to this point. On an earlier version of this bill, she gave a very compelling case that, first, we have a significant societal problem and, second, the government has a significant role to play. We can accept her research and her conclusions that we have a problem and there is something we can do about it.

The following is from her very thoughtful speech, which I found very compelling.

She stated:

Scientific research is making more and more worrisome connections between the consumption of pornography and the health or behaviour of young people. When adolescents frequently view pornography, it can lead to compulsive consumption, create unrealistic expectations..., generate fear and anxiety, damage their self-esteem...[and] cause symptoms of depression and impair social functioning.

I accept the evidence that we have a problem. What is the role for the government? What would Bill S-210 do? It is always helpful to first look at a bill would not do, just to narrow the parameters.

● (1125)

It would not do these things: It would not make pornography illegal, at least not more illegal than it already is, because we do have some rules around that. It would not affect people 18 and over, because the target audience here is our children. Finally, it would not prevent people from sharing pornography privately online, because the focus of this legislation is organizations, companies, enterprises and firms that are in the business of hosting porn platforms.

Private Members' Business

What would it do? Bill S-210 would create a new offence, that of making sexually explicit material available to a young person on the Internet. That is the new crime. It would be punishable with a \$250,000 fine for a first offence and \$500,000 fines for subsequent events. This is serious business.

There is a due diligence defence for porn platforms. If an organization is under investigation, it has a good defence if it can demonstrate that it implemented a prescribed age verification method to limit access by children.

The preamble to the bill says, "online age-verification technology is increasingly sophisticated and can now effectively ascertain the age of users without breaching their privacy rights". I think it is a good quote:

There is probably some argument about that, and I am interested to learn more about it. What is at the heart of the bill is that we tell the porn platforms to do their best to verify a person's age using age verification tools prescribed and approved by the government before one grants them access. If one does that, one is within the law.

What are those prescribed tools, and who would administer the program? Would it be the CRTC, the RCMP or a new bureaucracy?

The answer is that we are going to have to wait and see, stay tuned. All that needs to be worked out.

This is a private member's bill, so the bill cannot include any new expenditures. A way to get around that is to allow the government to set up the regulatory framework, the regulatory scheme that is going to implement the framework set up by this bill. There would be a one-year coming-into-force delay to give the government time to do that, to figure out the next steps.

For now, the bill is not perfect, but it is a good first step in the right direction; as we often hear from the government's side of the House, much more work still needs to be done. I agree with that.

The process for getting the bill here has been a long and winding road. It has faced resistance from many corners, including from those who say it infringes on our constitutional rights to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of other forms of media and communication.

Others mention the age verification technology and methodology through face recognition technology, because that would probably be what we are talking about. We do not know for sure, because the regulations have not been drafted. Privacy experts say that this infringes on our privacy rights under federal and provincial legislation.

They may be right. This is a real concern. I am looking forward to hearing from our constitutional law, privacy and technology experts at committee to have them help us steer around these challenges. Then, we can implement a law that is lawful and effective in keeping our children safe.

I will be voting yes to this bill at second reading, so we can start that very important work.

I want to end on a personal note. I am concerned about my grandchildren. I think about the dangers of the Internet, and I am

not thinking only about porn but also other matters that the member for Winnipeg North raised as well: misinformation, disinformation, cyber-bullying and hatred, which is so easily spread around the world. We must all learn to discern such things, which is what we taught our kids and what they are teaching their children.

Bill S-210 is just another tool to get us there. I compare this to other laws that we have in place for keeping people safe. A good example is that we have laws against speeding in playground zones; yet, we tell our children to look both ways before they cross the street. We have laws against assault, but we tell our children not to walk down dark alleyways at night alone. This is just common sense. The law can only do so much.

This bill is a good framework for moving forward. It is the least we can do. We are on the home stretch. Let us bring it home.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois believes that Bill S-210 is an important bill that reflects our role here in the House rather well. Sometimes we go through disgraceful sittings where we have vote after vote on things that we know will not advance our constituents' interests or values. It often disappoints me for various reasons when people play partisan politics. What goes on in the House is not always inspiring.

However, this morning we are presented with something that is inspiring. We have a chance to fix a problem. It is always a pleasure to hear this kind of proposal, and I would be happy to help advance this bill.

Shockingly, there is currently no mechanism whatsoever in Quebec or in Canada to prevent a young person from accessing pornographic content on the Internet. From infancy to adulthood, our young people grow up in a system or an environment where they have access to all sorts of images and videos that probably none of us wants them to be able to access. We must fix that. That is our duty. We must make sure that the children who will make up tomorrow's society grow up in an environment that is conducive to a decent education and to good mental and physical health. Bill S-210 will contribute to that, so I am proud to be a part of this process.

What will Bill S-210 do? Essentially, it will do three things. First of all, it will create a method for verifying the age of the individuals visiting these sites. I admit that this is quite a challenge. I am not a geek or Internet expert, so I have a little trouble imagining how it will get done, but I have faith in the people who know a lot more about these things than me. I look forward to seeing how this age verification method is going to be implemented. Once again, it is a big challenge, but it is a big challenge for our society, and I agree wholeheartedly that we should move forward with it. Work will be done in committee. I suspect that we will probably hear a little, maybe even a lot, about existing or potential methods of verifying age. The matter deserves serious attention to ensure that we come up with a good, reliable method.

The bill requires the method to meet five criteria.

First of all, it must be “reliable”. I think that goes without saying.

Second, it must maintain “user privacy”. We live in a society where every individual is entitled to privacy, and we wish to preserve that right. As a result, the mechanism will have to be sufficiently intrusive to work, while also maintaining the individual's privacy.

Third, it must collect and use personal information “solely for age-verification purposes”. We do not want the method to be used for purposes other than enforcing the law, which I think is a legitimate and prudent concern.

Fourth, speaking of prudence, we need to make sure that “any personal information collected for age-verification purposes” is destroyed once the verification is completed. We do not want personal information to stay on the web. The information must therefore be destroyed once the verification is completed.

Fifth, the method must generally comply “with best practices in the fields of age verification and privacy protection”. That is obviously a positive thing. We cannot stand against something as obviously positive as compliance with best practices.

● (1135)

The age verification method will have to respect all those criteria. I am eager to hear more about it in committee, and I suspect the discussions will be very interesting. I hope that we will be able to pass the bill quickly and that it will take effect before our young people are further contaminated.

I said that there were three things the bill would do. First, it will create the method, and second, it will designate an enforcement authority. That is also important. We do not want to entrust the responsibility to the owners of the pornographic sites or other sites to which we wish to control access. I think it is prudent to have an independent authority that has the necessary skills, experience and objectivity to enforce the law.

Lastly, the bill provides for an annual report to confirm the number of applications made, the number of verifications done, and the final outcome. This will allow us to see how the system is working over time, year by year. Will it need minor adjustments? If so, we will make them. If not, we will have implemented a useful and effective system that respects the values and interests of all Quebecers and Canadians.

Private Members' Business

For all of these reasons, we will gladly support this bill. As I said earlier, I believe we were elected to introduce these types of bills. I will be happy to work with my Liberal, Conservative, NDP and Green Party colleagues to ensure that the bill satisfies everyone and is true to its underlying principles.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has the floor for her right of reply.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I was listening to this debate, I found myself getting a little hot under the collar. I think that is because we are seeing violence against women becoming rampant in this country. Municipalities are declaring an epidemic. People at the provincial and federal levels are talking about the need for shelters, the need for police officers to be trained and all these things.

Why is this important for today's debate? In my initial speech a few weeks ago, I stated, “I am talking about children and the fact is that what children would see is 87% of these acts are ones of violence against women.” That is why I am bringing this up.

Yes, we can talk about all the different elephants in this room, because this chamber is a zoo full of jungle animals. However, we can deal with more than one at a time. What I am saying is this: If we have 10 elephants in the room, we can take one bite out of one elephant, which is the violence against women elephant. There is something we can do; yes, I am speaking to members. We can take a small bite out of an enormous elephant here, and one thing we are asking for is that children under the age of 18 do not have access to pornography.

Government Orders

We can talk about all the horrific things that are going on in this world. I can tell members, when we talk about abusive language, that as politicians and women, we receive it every day. I do not think there is one member of Parliament in this place who has not received something that is absolutely horrifying and probably as a daily piece. If we want to hear from the Privacy Commissioner or from people who may be against this bill, then we should invite them to committee so it can hear that, not because Liberal members suggest their government is going to come up with legislation. I have watched the government come up with legislation that has sat there, stalled and done nothing. At the end of the day, 79% of women are facing violence. We know that one in two women are now experiencing domestic violence issues; it used to be one in three, under eight years ago. If we want to make a change, we need to do that, not suggest that the government will do something in the future. The Liberals have to get off that.

One woman is killed every two days. In Ontario alone, 62 women have been killed this year. If we allow those stats to continue, then members should just say that they are too partisan to vote for my bill, because that is exactly what I am seeing in this place. It is shameful.

This is about women. This is about ensuring that our children know how to play safely in the sandbox and understand what consent is. The things we know that children see when they are watching pornography blanks them and paralyzes their common sense. This bill is about common sense. It is about ensuring that our women are safe and that our children are not shown pornography at an early age. I do not care what they do when they are 18, but we should be protecting our children who are under the age of 18, women and vulnerable people. I do not see any support from the government, and I am devastated that it cannot see through that.

• (1140)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion.

[English]

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, may I please have a recorded division?

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, December 13, 2023, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 11:42 a.m., the House will suspend until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:42 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to present updates to Bill C-56, as they are timely and are required to better tackle the increasing cost of living by strengthening Canada's competition law. Two months ago, the government introduced Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act. As members may recall, it was presented as a down payment of sorts on broader reform efforts with respect to Canada's competition law, with more comprehensive amendments to follow pursuant to the fall economic statement.

There has already been considerable debate in the chamber on this important piece of legislation, so let us talk about market studies, which are a key part of the legislation. Bill C-56 would provide the Competition Bureau with much-needed market study powers. It is important to ensure that the bureau would retain its independence while it does this. This is why we have supported an update that expressly confirms that the commissioner would be able to initiate a market study. This would remove any possible ambiguity over the market study process and would ensure that the bureau retains its discretion as an independent law enforcement agency. The update would ensure that the bureau would be able to look into specific market issues that it identifies as warranting scrutiny. The modification reflects the existing inquiry structure under the act, where it is already the case that either the commissioner or the minister may initiate an inquiry into potential anti-competitive activity, at which point the commissioner assumes full control of the investigation.

The government's proposal has taken these concerns into account by creating a framework that would balance the need for independence, the benefit of collecting information and the safeguards required to protect businesses and public funds. This is why both the commissioner and the minister would be required to consult before any study is undertaken. Requiring consultation would ensure that Canadians would benefit from a market study that has been thoroughly considered and appropriately tailored. The proposal made by the government to update Bill C-56's market study provisions would also keep the framework aligned with international precedents, with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia all offering various forms of oversight to ensure appropriate use of market study power. Central to this is a test of the abuse of dominance.

Government Orders

In order to effectively address increasing prices, we need to enhance more than just the bureau's ability to conduct market studies. It is also important that the law be able to hold today's well-resourced and sophisticated businesses to account. In particular, we need to better address large players who, many believe, abuse their market power to shut out competition, especially given the clear concerns raised throughout our consultation about protecting competition in and contestability of these markets.

There are all different kinds of competition. We could talk about the fact that the big grocery chains have been recording record profits. One would think that if companies are posting record profits, they would be in a position to lower prices in order to attract more market share, but we did not see that, which suggests that something in the free market system is not working as we would normally expect it to work. There are other forms of potential anti-competitive behaviour. The ability to get shelf space in a major grocery store is a real competition, and the grocery stores have the hammer, to use a curling term, to find out who gets the market space. More and more, in my own personal observations when I go into grocery stores, I see the in-store brands taking more and more shelf space, with the other brands effectively being crowded out.

We believe there has been an unnecessarily high burden to prove behaviours clearly damaging to the public interest. This is out of line with our international partners, by the way, including the United States, the European Union and Australia. These jurisdictions better allocate the burden of proof and allow the agencies to act more easily where harm is apparent. This can include by requiring proof of intent or effects, but not necessarily both. The government's update to Bill C-56 would allow abuse of dominance to be established on the basis of either intent or effects, following the actions of a dominant firm. This would allow for more effective enforcement of the act where there is harmful conduct by large players. It would accomplish what the act is meant to do: stop big businesses from abusing their position to the detriment of competition. The detriment of competition is a detriment to the citizens of Canada.

• (1205)

As I noted before, the purpose of remedial orders is to protect competition in the market, not to punish its actors. Recognizing the lower burden involved in securing a remedial order that this change would bring about, the law would limit the remedy in these cases to a prohibition order. More serious remedies, such as monetary penalties and divestiture orders, would continue to require that both anti-competitive intent and effect be proven. This two-tiered approach would help guard against chilling, aggressive competition on the merits.

The government already took an important first step to address this concern by positioning penalties to serve as more effective compliance measures against abuse of dominance. We did this through the 2022 amendments to the Competition Act that removed an ineffective and outdated cap on monetary penalties. We introduced a more principled approach that could better accommodate larger volumes of commerce. Firms engaged in anti-competitive conduct can now face a penalty set at up to three times the benefit obtained for their anti-competitive conduct, to ensure that it is not profitable to them. While this was an important update to move

away from the outdated and ineffective fixed penalty system, the old fixed amounts of \$10 million, or \$15 million for a second order, still remain in the law. This is in the event that they are still higher than the new proportionate maximum. However, it is possible that these fallback numbers could still be too low to act as a deterrent in certain cases where abuse by a big business is significant but caught early, and thus benefit derived from it is still modest.

As everyone here knows, competition is a driving force behind innovation and efficiency in our economy. It ensures a healthy, fair and vibrant marketplace. This is what the free market system is supposed to nurture and protect. Of course, competition is instrumental in bringing down prices. The fact that we have not seen prices fall in spite of the dominant profits being recorded by big grocery and some of the producers but that we see things like shrinkflation and skimpflation creeping in, where we are paying more for a smaller or inferior product, means that something is not working. When something is not working between what the market price is and what Canadians value, then we think it is the job of government to come in and close that gap.

For Canadians, the updates to Bill C-56 would mean more choice and better affordability. When someone needs to pay their bills, the exact motivations or mechanisms behind anti-competitive conduct do not matter. The effect of paying higher prices remains the same. What does matter is that businesses can be held to account. It matters that the law can impose meaningful penalties to ensure compliance. It matters that the Competition Bureau has the information it needs to study problems in the market.

The updates to Bill C-56 have been prioritized because they are the most directly related to addressing the issues identified in the grocery retail sectors. In fact, if we look at the whole landscape, particularly the concerns about inflation, the two big players to this point, at least in the retail market, have been gas, oil and diesel, and grocery. We have seen the market handle gas and oil, because the prices have been dropping at the pumps, which is a welcome sign for most Canadians, and probably one of the main reasons inflation in Canada has dropped to well less than half of what it was about a year ago. However, the thing to remember is that the provisions in Bill C-56 now, and what is coming, would apply to all sectors of the economy. As such, they would have a broad and, we hope, positive impact.

Government Orders

These changes would also be just the first steps in responding to the issues that have been identified by the stakeholders and the public in our comprehensive consultation on Canada's competition law. As the government announced in its fall economic statement, it intends to introduce significant additional amendments for the consideration of Parliamentarians in the coming weeks. Perhaps in the question period to come, some of the hon. members here in the chamber can suggest some additional amendments that we should consider in the coming weeks.

• (1210)

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Madam Speaker, competition is at the front and centre of everyone's minds right now, especially when Canadians are paying the highest grocery bills ever in the history of this nation. Even the report that came out last week said that grocery bills in 2024 are going to go up still another \$700 per family, and they are struggling now just to buy the basic necessities.

Could the member please tell the House what exactly this bill would do to lower that \$700 bill per family next year?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, to be honest, the hon. member's question is key. The first thing we have to do is really get a firm grasp about what is causing prices to be so high. Hon. members would point to the carbon tax, but there was a report out of the University of Calgary that said, no, that was not really it.

We would point to the war between Ukraine and Russia, with Ukraine's exports of grains being greatly reduced because of the conflict, which has had a chilling effect on the availability of food around the world that then had an effect on prices. However, it is anti-competitive behaviour at a time when all of the major grocery chains are recording record profits that suggests there is something not working properly in the free market system. That, I think, is the purpose of the Competition Act amendments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hope my colleagues in the House are having a good start to their week.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-56, which would refund the GST to builders. What bothers me, however, is that Bill C-56 extends over seven years, so that means the rebate will be spread over seven years. In 2023, it is hard to foresee what is going to happen in a month or six months.

How can we be sure that a bill like this will be effective when it is going to extend over seven years and plenty of questions remain about the criteria for housing affordability and the desired potential reduction in rent?

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, the fact is that two years ago we would not have foreseen the situation we face today. The fact is that this is going to be long term. It will intentionally be a forever measure to deal with anti-competitive behaviour in whatever sector it arrives. It is necessary right now to deal with groceries. It will certainly be fundamental in dealing with some of the issues on

housing, which the hon. member presented, but it is also going to have to be nimble.

Over the course of the years to come, the House will have to sit down and consider what is going on in the day, look at the Competition Act and make the changes necessary to ensure that basically everybody in the market is getting a fair shake. That means not only the producers, the grocery stores and the farmers, but also the consumers.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, very much related to Bill C-56 is the degree to which corporations are making record profits these days while everyone else seems to be suffering.

We recently had Galen Weston, chairman of Loblaw, appear before the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. His profits continue to rise while everyone else, all Canadian families, especially in my riding, are having to struggle and make do without. We see the same thing in the oil and gas sector. Over the last three years, its profits have gone up by over 1,000%. Mr. Weston thought that his executive compensation, which is 431 times the average salary of one of his workers, is a reasonable amount, and he could not tell the committee how many of his full-time workers have had to access a food bank to get by.

Conservatives do not want to talk about gross corporate profits these days, but I would like to hear from my hon. colleague what the Liberals are going to do to tackle this corporate culture in which corporations are continuing to make profits while everyone else suffers. We have had 40 years of too much corporate deference in this country. What are they going to do to start turning that around to make sure that the pendulum swings back in favour of Canadian families?

• (1215)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, it is like an onion. There are layers upon layers of things that need to be considered. I would direct him and anybody witnessing this to the Roosevelt Institute in the United States, which is looking at a fundamental rebalancing of the wealth that comes out of the market. That rebalancing will be away from the CEOs, the boards and the executives and more towards the workers. We have seen this in the resurgence of union activity in the country, where unions are again having the opportunity and the ability to assert the rights of working people and skim maybe a little more off of the top of the executive compensation, which has really gone off the rails, I would say, in the last 20 to 30 years.

This Competition Act amendment is an iterative thing. It will be subject to amendments as we see opportunities to make things better for Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question to the member concerns both legislative and budgetary measures. On the issue of the affordability of groceries, the government, in the last budget, came forward with a grocery rebate, which literally put cash in the pockets of somewhere in the neighbourhood of 11 million Canadians. I wonder if my colleague can provide his thoughts as to why that was an important thing to do for Canadians.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, that question highlights two things. First of all, the strategy generally used by the government has been to ensure that the people who need the help get it. That is the reason, for instance, that we took the Canada child benefit away from millionaires and made it income tested so the people who actually needed the help got it.

In the case of the grocery rebate, that could not have come at a better time because things such as the Competition Act and this act are all meant to relieve the pressure on people and fix things that are wrong in the market system, and the grocery rebate was something that helped to bridge people earning very low incomes over the hump while all of these elements came together for Bill C-56. I would not discount, perhaps, the need to do that again at some point in the future. I would advocate for it as an individual MP. Of course, it is up to the government to assess the situation and move forward.

Bill C-56 is meant to solve the problem for which the grocery rebate was a band-aid on a wound that needs healing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, part of the legislation deals with the purpose-built rentals in an attempt to see more rentals being constructed emphasize a good strong public policy. Now we are witnessing other provinces adopting the same approach where PST is also being exempted.

I wonder if my colleague could provide his thoughts on the federal government working along with the provincial government, with the federal government playing a leadership role, and on how it really makes a difference because we are going to see thousands of new units come on stream in the coming years. Could the member provide his thoughts on that aspect of the legislation and the impact it would have?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, my experience with metro Vancouver's transportation authority revealed a number of issues connected to the hon. member's question.

Municipalities are stressed because, if, for instance, we build new high rises, as we will through our riding of Fleetwood—Port Kells along the new SkyTrain line, which the government is supporting with funding, the municipalities have to keep up with the water, sewer, all of the other infrastructure, schools, parks, recreation centres etc.

The pattern until now in metro Vancouver has been for new growth to pay for new growth. The could easily erase the benefits of the removal of the GST and the PST on purpose-built rental units. Therefore, with respect to the support that we are offering and want to offer, and in addition to the partnerships that we have with the provinces, we need to factor in our municipalities as part-

Government Orders

ners as well because they are left holding a pretty large bill that also needs to be satisfied if this is going to be a success.

• (1220)

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to share my time with the hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, I can speak for 20, 30 or 40 minutes about this important topic. I am happy to stand in the House today on the report stage of Bill C-56.

We have been talking about competition quite a bit in the House, including the need for competition and the lack of competition. We know that Canada has a competition problem. We see it in every sector that Canadians are a part of, including cell phones, banking, groceries, wireless and Internet. There is not really any sector in the Canadian economy that is not dominated by oligopolies and monopolies.

When this bill came along, we looked at it favourably because certain aspects were going to be improved. Mostly we looked at it favourably because there were Conservative aspects that were part of it, including my private member's bill, which was read into the act. Of course, I have a new private member's bill. We are all happy for that, and we are moving on.

The crux of the bill, the affordable housing and groceries act, is really anticlimactic in that, when this bill receives royal assent and becomes law, it will not really change the fact that Canadians are still paying the highest grocery fees and are in the worst housing crisis in this country's history. That is because the bill does promise to make some changes to the Competition Act. This bill would do some minor tinkering around the edges for what we need to have changed in the Competition Act. However, it does not do the real hard work. It does not have the courage to change the real things that need to happen to change competition in Canada.

The bill would enact Competition Act changes. It would certainly make some provisions and changes to the abuse of dominance. It looks at illuminating the efficiencies defence, which was in my private member's bill that came forward. It looks at how market studies should be handled by the Competition Bureau itself.

Government Orders

However, when it comes to the real aspects that are hurting consumers at the grocery store right now, where they are paying 20% more for groceries after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, it does not tackle the biggest aspect, which is the carbon tax. The carbon tax is added to the farmer, to the trucker, to the manufacturer, to the cold storage facility, so it is added one, two, three, four times to the consumer bill and passed on to the consumer.

It certainly does not tackle the fact that, when it comes to housing in Canada, we are building fewer homes now than we did in 1972, when we have over 40 million Canadians in this country right now. It certainly does not tackle the fact that, because of high inflation after eight years, the costs of everything have gone up, including building materials and labour for homes. The fact is that over the years, we have built up a big barrier of what we call Nimbyism, protecting our backyards from others so that we cannot build homes.

Consumers are stretched. Mortgage renewals are coming due. Over 70% of Canadians with a fixed mortgage will have to renew their mortgage over the next two years, this during the fastest run-up of interest rates in the whole history of this country.

The carbon tax had unintended consequences, and consumers are screaming. They were promised that they would get more back in rebates than they put in. However, the unintended consequences have been that those carbon taxes have added costs to grocery bills. Those added costs are on the price of almost everything that Canadians are paying. They see the rebate in their hands, compared to the bills they are paying each and every day, and Canadians are smart. They now know that they are paying way more in those carbon taxes than they are getting in rebates. After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, Canadians cannot afford any more.

We have looked at competition, and we have looked at the two parts of the act that we need to solidify. One is to put a stranglehold on how big the big, bossy, dominant conglomerates, oligopolies and monopolies can get in Canada. Canadians have had enough, whether it is cell phone bills, where we have three companies that control 90% of all cell phones in Canada, which are the most expensive three carriers out of 128 carriers in 64 countries, or whether it is groceries, where we used to have competition in Canada. Eight grocery stores used to run and compete with one another, driving prices lower. It is now down to only three Canadian companies competing with two American conglomerates. They used to all be Canadian competitors. We used to be able to go to different stores. Now Canadians find that they oftentimes going to the same competitors.

● (1225)

Obviously, prices have not gone down, and this is only after the last eight years with a Competition Act that was outdated. It has certainly outlived its prime, since the Competition Act was created based on the 1960s industrial policy, which said, "We want Canadian companies to get as big as possible to compete internationally." It is actually in the purpose clause of the Competition Act right now to make Canadian companies as big as possible so that they can compete internationally. This is what we deem as competition. When it comes to competition, we want more companies to compete, not internationally but to compete for Canadians' dollars.

Canadian companies should not be able to make all of their money on the backs of hard-working Canadians; Canadian companies need to compete with one another for Canadians' hard-earn tax dollar.

The breadth of this Competition Act, which needs to be changed, is the premise and the purpose of the Competition Act. Number one, we need to ensure that big-box conglomerates and corporations cannot get bigger on the backs of hard-working Canadians. However, the second and most important aspect of the Competition Act is to ensure that we have competition or that we have start-ups in Canada.

Canada now, according to the BDC, has 100,000 fewer entrepreneurs compared to 20 years ago, despite our population increasing by over 10 million people. Canada has failed to create competition. We can look at one aspect to say that we would really love to make sure that we stifle the top monopolies and oligopolies and make sure that they cannot merge with one another, but the other big problem we have missed along the way is to have start-ups created to compete with one another. It used to be that Canada was the bastion for that, and we were able to find start-ups and have great Canadian companies start up and grow in scale, but for the first time in our history, we have fewer start-ups per capita than ever before, after eight years of this government.

When we talk about new jobs and creating wealth in this country, which is something I am afraid we are going to have to speak about a lot over the next year, we look to small business and start-ups to fulfill that role. Ninety-seven per cent of all new jobs in Canada are created by small business. When we look at the complexity and the value of these small businesses, the men and women who can take a risk and start something new in Canada, right now what we are missing most of all is to ensure that we create those jobs and businesses in this nation.

At the end of the day, we have to really look at what this bill would do and what it would not do. We are certainly going to vote for this legislation. At the end of the day, the Competition Bureau itself has been ignored for the last eight years. Coincidentally, the first time that this government starts talking about it is when the opposition leader names a competition shadow minister for the first time in government, which looks at the importance of what competition can do for the nation and what it means for Canadians. Of course, the first thing it means is prices, and the second thing is our jobs and paycheques. We can create new start-ups and new businesses.

For instance, when we look at the banking sector, the biggest thing we are trying to put forward is consumer-led or open banking. There is an opportunity, where this government has been dragging its feet, to create hundreds upon hundreds of financial tech institutions that can not only create jobs and paycheques for Canadians, but provide options for Canadians of where to put their hard-earned money when it comes to financial services in Canada. I would hope that through this, and we will be talking about it when we get back in January, the government introduces the legislation that it promised in 2018.

Government Orders

More importantly, as Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act, comes forth, Canadians are going to be angry about how anti-climactic it will be. Grocery prices are not going to go down after the bill passes, nor will our housing crisis be solved. It would do something important for the Competition Act, but not nearly enough to undo what has already been done. Most importantly, it would not create the start-ups that have stopped, the start-ups that can drive housing starts and create more options and more food in the value chain.

We need boldness, and we need courage. We need a new government to present policy that would actually create homes and grow food without punishing our farmers in this country. It is time to bring it home for farmers, for our country and for Canadians looking for a home of their own.

• (1230)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is a certain amount of hypocrisy here. The member talked about, at the beginning of his speech, the idea of competition and said that the Conservatives want competition. Then he talked about the big five. The last time there was actually an amalgamation of grocery stores, when a grocery store was bought up, was with Shoppers under Stephen Harper. Stephen Harper and the member's current leader allowed Shoppers, through billions of dollars, to be consumed by Loblaws.

Then the member stands up and says that they want more competition. Where was the member when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, let alone today's leader of the Conservative Party? They were nowhere when it came to competition. Why should Canadians believe that anything has changed with the Conservative Party, when its members consistently vote against good, solid policy initiatives?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, let us talk about hypocrisy, then, for a minute. Here are the mergers that have been approved by the Competition Bureau since the Trudeau government has been in power: Air Canada was approved to buy—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the hon. member that he is not to use the name of parliamentarians who sit in the House.

The hon. member for Bay of Quinte can continue.

Mr. Ryan Williams: I am sorry, Madam Speaker. I did not even realize I did that.

Here are the mergers that have gone through: Air Canada and Air Transat in 2019, approved by the Competition Bureau; Rogers and Shaw in 2022; RBC approved to buy HSBC in 2023; WestJet buying Sunwing in 2022; Superior Propane buying Canexus in 2018; and Sobeys approved to buy Farm Boy in 2018. The hypocrisy knows no bounds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke at length about one of the two aspects of the current debate on Bill C-56, which amends the Competition Act, among other things. We agree; it is not going to solve every problem.

The other aspect this bill addresses is housing, in particular the GST on rental housing. It touches on this other problem that we have heard a lot about and that is a real scourge this year: housing.

What my colleague did not mention is that the only solution his party has proposed so far on the housing issue is a bill introduced by his leader, a bill that is essentially designed to show cities some tough love and tell them that funding will be cut if they do not meet their targets.

That is not what cities, particularly those in my riding, need to successfully address the housing issue. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, housing is very important. Speaking as a former municipal councillor, I know the buck really falls with the municipalities. There is a provincial act that oversees the municipal act itself, but it does come down to the municipalities to be able to push things forward, and that is the Nimbyism I have pointed out.

I am going to talk about some stats that came out today, and this is after eight years of the government. The Rentals.ca December rent report confirmed that while American rents are beginning to stabilize, Canadian rents remain at record highs. The average rent increased 8.4% this year. "One-bedroom apartment annual rent growth remained strongest", with an average of \$1,943. There are people in Toronto who are renting the other side of the bed; that is how bad it has become.

We believe we need to incentivize but also reward municipalities for pushing through rental and construction as a whole. We believe that as party, and I believe that as a former municipal politician.

There are so many times when it is easy for a municipal politician to vote down a rental agreement or a plan that comes forward. We need to find ways to incentivize municipalities that are getting things done, especially around high-density transit, especially where we need housing and especially where we need rental.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, another point the member did not talk about when he talked about how much they would love to get rid of the price on pollution is the rebate. The rebate ensures that over 80% of people get more money back than they pay in with regard to the price on pollution. Could the member be very clear on whether he supports Canadians getting the environmental rebate?

Government Orders

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, yes, members I have talked to are all looking forward to the rebate when we axe the tax and get rid of all the tax they are paying. Canadians know when they go to the grocery store now that they are seeing the increase because the farmers and the manufacturers and the truckers have all incurred increases and are passing them on. Why are food prices the highest they have ever been in the history of Canada? It is because of the carbon tax. Canadians want that tax off. Let us axe the tax.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for sharing his time with me.

After eight years of this Liberal Prime Minister, inflation has reached its highest level in 40 years. I can say that I would not want to be in the shoes of the Liberal government right now.

Salaries of middle-class Canadians no longer cover even housing, which has doubled, and groceries, which are predicted to rise even more this year. Increasing numbers of people rely on food banks, and children have almost nothing in their school lunch boxes, which is a crying shame.

The effects of drug legislation are being felt. The increase in addiction rates is harming families and our sense of security. This is where we have landed, thanks to the wildly reckless spending of this Prime Minister and his spendthrift government, which attempts to buy votes with wishful thinking. He wants people to forget the disaster he has caused to those who can no longer make ends meet.

Let us not mince words. We will all pay for this Liberal government's disastrous policies over the next 25 or 30 years. Let us be frank in the House. We now find ourselves with a failed Prime Minister, a failed government, public spending in the red, and a society that is being unwittingly bankrupted, and no longer knows how it is going to pay its grocery bills.

I would like to be reassuring, but how can we continue to have faith given the scale of the challenges before us each day and the financial threat that looms over so many households? As the Prime Minister says, we will continue doing this, that or the other. Well, empty words no longer work.

This is truly scandalous, without a doubt. In eight years of governing, only the Liberals could think of this and pull off such a thing. Since 2006, I have proudly represented the people of Lévis—Lotbinière. The previous Conservative government was responsible and had a vision for our young people, our future and our economy.

The sad reality is that this bill resolves absolutely nothing while increasing public spending and taxes. Years ago the Liberal government should have put in place new housing measures and certain measures to reduce the cost of groceries. Homelessness is now a reality for hard-working people who, not so long ago, could afford housing. Faced with \$20 billion in new costly spending, we were quickly walked through this mini-budget in the fall. Prices are going up, rents are going up, the debt is going up, and taxes are going up. What about the price of groceries? That is going up too. More than \$20 billion in new inflationary spending will keep inflation and interest rates at a higher level than Canadians can afford to pay.

The end of the year is approaching, and the honeymoon with this Liberal government is definitely over. I wonder what the Prime Minister will be thinking on his next trip while he is lying on the beach in the sun. We hope that this time the trip will be at his own expense. What will he think of the sad reality of people who have trouble affording a turkey for Christmas, putting presents under the tree, if there is one, heating their homes, or putting gas in their vehicles? Many Canadians and Quebecers will find that 2024 is going to be as harsh as this winter, especially since the government is proposing to raise taxes on the backs of the middle class. Ironically, there is a lot to be stressed about: Next year this Prime Minister will spend more money on servicing the debt than on paying for Canadians' health care.

As for balancing the budget, maybe that will happen in 30 years, because it has become a mirage. Members may recall that the Liberal government told Canadians they would balance the budget by 2028. Since the Minister of Finance announced that pious wish, she has announced \$100 billion in new expenses. Even though we need millions of new housing units by 2030, the government, which has been scrimping on important issues since it came to power, announced this fall it would spend \$15 billion on a fund that will support the construction of barely 1,500 housing units a year. I would like to remind the government that 2030 is only six years away. That is not very long, except for the people who have to sleep outside or those who have been paying double for housing since the Liberal ice age.

Now more than ever, it is clear that this bill does nothing to help ordinary Canadians. Even worse, Canadians are becoming even poorer.

● (1240)

We have seen what this Liberal government has gotten wrong. Here are a few facts to help convince my colleagues. There were a record two million visits to the food bank in a single month. The cost of housing has doubled. Mortgage payments are 150% higher now than when this government came to power. Violent crime has increased by 39%. There are tent cities in almost every major city in Canada, and a lot of the people who live there are people we know. More than half of Canadians are \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills. Canadians who renew their mortgage at the current rate will see an increase of 2% to 6% or more. The IMF says that Canada is the G7 country most likely to experience a mortgage default crisis. Worse yet, the business bankruptcy rate increased by 37% this year.

Government Orders

While Canadians are up to their necks in debt and there is no foreseeable miracle forthcoming from the Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition, we are trying to find a way back to a common-sense solution, a way of really being heard to mitigate the daily suffering of people across the country. I said I have been a legislator since 2006. I can say that I am not the only one to long for a government that knows how to count and invest every one of Canadian taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. A lot of people were deceived by the siren song of the Liberals' promises, and we are all paying the price now. This also proves that voting for the Bloc is costly.

They can say anything they want across the aisle and talk about the horrors of going backwards, but this country needs a Conservative government to put it back on track. We need to understand that our country was doing well, very well, actually, before this Liberal government came to power. Let us remember the interest and inflation rates before this Prime Minister. They were low. Taxes dropped faster than at any other time in our country's history. We had a balanced budget. Crime was down 25%. Our borders were secure. Housing cost half of what it does today. Net wages increased by 10% after inflation and income tax. What are we seeing now? It is a disaster. Many Canadians will have to wait up to 25 years to save enough money to buy their first house and, for many of them, home ownership is an impossible dream.

The legacy the Liberals are leaving us is a world upside down. Come the next election, voters will have two options. The first is a costly Liberal-Bloc-NDP coalition that will take taxpayers' money, raise taxes, and enable more crime. The second option is a common-sense Conservative government that will enable people to earn a bigger paycheque to buy groceries, gas and a home in a safe community. The choice is obvious. Let us just hope that our country can hold on until then.

With last fall's mini-budget, we are going to pay more taxes, because the government raised the carbon tax across the country. It is going to quadruple. That does not make any sense, and it is truly outrageous. Bill C-234 would give Canadian taxpayers a little breathing room by eliminating the carbon tax for Canadian farmers. That would bring down food prices in Canada. When the government taxes the farmers who grow food and the truckers who transport it, Canadians have to pay more to put food on the table. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change promised to resign if this bill were passed. He is not thinking about those who are struggling to make ends meet at the end of every week.

Will the Prime Minister choose to save his environment minister or to feed Canadians by lowering the cost of food through Bill C-234, which must be passed but is stuck in the Senate because of the Prime Minister's machinations? The choice is easy and obvious. Let us help our farmers and all Canadians.

• (1245)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as an FYI to the member, this bill is not about what he talked about. What he needs to recognize is that one of the big initiatives in this legislation would exempt purpose-built rentals from GST, a good, sound policy. I suspect that the Conservatives might

vote in favour of that. After all, we have now seen provinces get on board. A number of provinces are doing likewise for the PST.

The federal government is leading on the housing issue, and I am wondering if my Conservative friend can explain why we as a national government today lead on housing-related issues, whereas the Conservatives in the past, under their current leader, did absolutely nothing when it came to housing in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, let me remind the government that what little it has fixed when it comes to housing in Canada is only a drop in the ocean.

The government promised \$15 billion in loans and to possibly build 1,500 more housing units per year when millions more are needed. With the Liberals, it will take 2,500 years to get to where we want to be. We will need between 4 and 5 million more housing units by 2030. With the Liberal government, that is an unattainable target.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, when it comes to housing, the Conservatives made cuts too and did not invest enough in social and community housing, which is what is needed.

That said, how does my colleague from Quebec deal with the fact that his Conservative colleague was shown on *Infoman* to have taken some liberties with the truth—to keep things parliamentary—on the carbon tax, according to independent journalists?

This morning, we learned that independent economists raised red flags regarding the Conservative leader's so-called documentary. They said that his viral video—again, I am trying to keep things parliamentary—lacked in correctness and used arguments that are much too simplistic for such a serious crisis.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, I am going to talk about actual facts.

I have five children. Around 10 years ago, my oldest daughter bought a house for about \$150,000. Seven years ago, my second daughter bought a house. It cost an additional \$100,000. Three years ago, my son bought a house that cost an extra \$100,000 on top of that. It cost him \$350,000. My two youngest are barely able to rent a place because house prices have shot up past \$450,000, \$550,000 and \$650,000 in the space of half a generation.

Government Orders

When the Conservatives were in government, young people could buy and build a home. Today, in the Liberal era, it is impossible to even rent a home. Imagine that. These are the facts and this is reality. My family has lived it. This is what every Canadian family is experiencing today.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals in the House have been crowing about removing the GST on housing construction. I find it ironic, and would ask my colleague to comment on this, that they talk about making life more affordable by removing GST on housing yet the government has refused to remove the carbon tax on groceries, on everything we produce in this country and on gasoline.

I would ask my colleague to comment on the apparent contradiction between the Liberal government's intent to make life more affordable by removing the GST on housing and the fact that it will not axe the tax.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. The carbon tax is a totally hypocritical tax for all Canadians. It increases the price of everything, everything that is transported. All of our goods and services are transported all over Canada several times, and everyone keeps a cut. That is how we end up with two-by-fours going from \$3 each to \$12 each, and fruits and vegetables going from maybe 35¢ a pound to \$1.50 a pound.

This is never going to end. We need to get rid of the carbon tax, because that will lower the cost of everything.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): One second, I need to seek unanimous consent.

Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, this is the first time in two years that I have gotten the unanimous consent of the House, and I am proud of it. Before beginning my speech, I would like to make one thing clear. This is not a case of the Bloc, the NDP and the Liberal Party standing together. It is the Conservatives that stand alone. That is not the same thing.

Today we will be discussing Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act. I will be talking mostly about that last part of the bill, in terms of both its technical points and its rationale. Before we begin, though, we always need to establish what we are talking about. What is competition? It means coming together and converging on the same point. That is what competition is. It is not necessarily a bad thing. However, what is the motivation for coming together? What is the purpose? Is it good or bad? As members of Parliament, our objective must be commendable, because we obviously have the public interest at heart.

In one amendment, the bill would increase the maximum monetary penalty for abuse of a dominant position to \$25 million for the first offence and \$35 million for subsequent offences. The aim is to give the law teeth, to make sure that it will not be taken lightly, that people will not think that they can get away with a slap on the wrist. This provision also makes Canadian law more comparable to U.S. law, of course.

The second important amendment in the part on competition would allow the Competition Bureau to conduct market study inquiries if the minister responsible for the act or the commissioner of competition so recommends, and would require the minister to consult the commissioner before doing so.

The Competition Bureau already has significant powers, but it cannot demand certain things from the people it is investigating. It cannot request a search unless there is a clear offence. It cannot request a search just to look around. It cannot make assumptions. All of us here know that groceries are expensive and that we pay the highest cellphone fees in the OECD. It does not take a genius to realize that the commissioner might want to investigate these things.

When it conducts a study, the bureau will have to determine whether there is adequate competition in a market or industry. Right now, it does not have that power in every industry. What the Competition Bureau can do at present is all right, but it is not necessarily the best thing right now. It may have been sufficient at the time, but now it needs to be enhanced.

In its report on the state of competition in the grocery sector, published in June, the bureau noted that the grocery chains did not really co-operate with its study. I like that euphemism: "did not really co-operate". They said no, which is not the same thing, and the Competition Bureau, with its current powers, could not make them say yes. They refused to provide the documents the bureau asked for, and they refused to answer certain questions. My colleagues will no doubt agree that there are many shades of meaning between "did not really co-operate" and "refused to answer". The aim of Bill C-56 is to solve this problem by granting the Competition Bureau the power to conduct inquiries where applicable.

Lastly, the bill would revise the legal test for abuse of a dominant position prohibition order to be sufficiently met if the tribunal finds that a dominant player has engaged in either a practice of anti-competitive acts or conduct that is having or is likely to have the effect of preventing competition. That is the technical part of the bill. However, when someone drafts a bill, they need to think about why they are doing it, what they are trying to accomplish.

The purpose of the Competition Act is to ensure that Quebec and Canadian consumers have freedom of choice. We sometimes talk about monopolies. What is a monopoly? It is an exclusive right. What does "exclusive" mean? It means doing everything possible to keep others out. It means restricting, refusing, blocking, rejecting. Exclusivity means limiting access. It is almost like a secret agreement.

The bill also seeks to prevent stakeholders from abusing a dominant market position. To dominate means to master, to control. In the past minute, I have talked about refusing, blocking, mastering, controlling, exclusive rights. All of this goes against the free market that this country promises, that it says it has, but that is sometimes, in reality, only an illusion.

• (1255)

Essentially, the drafters of the bill wanted the Competition Bureau to have more power, the power to provide us with freedom of choice, the power to investigate where appropriate until it is satisfied that it can make this possible.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, competition means getting together and converging on the same point. If that is not possible, if certain players dominating a market prevent that from happening, we are being deprived of our freedom of choice. It is a sort of manipulation. It is a sort of lie.

Without calling anyone a liar, we can still talk about what a lie is, here in the House of Commons. A lie from someone in a dominant position may prevent someone else from doing something they would have done had they known the truth. Lies imply secrecy. Monopolies imply secrecy. It is this secrecy that this bill seeks to eliminate so that everyone can exercise freedom.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the comments about the bureau and how when we think of competition and enhancing competition, making changes to the act would, in fact, take away the efficiency argument.

Therefore, I believe, at the end of the day, it would be healthier for Canadians because it would ensure there is more competition. The member made reference to cellphones. Whether it is cellphones or groceries, taking away the efficiency argument within this legislation, I believe, would help address that going forward.

Can he expand on why it was good to see changes to the legislation affecting the bureau?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, those who hold monopolies or exclusive rights do not need to be good at what they do. They just have to be there. At the end of the day, they can charge whatever they want, with whatever conditions they want, to whoever they want. They do not have to sell to everyone if they do not want to.

The law will need to improve the efficiency of service providers, because they will not have the luxury of serving a passive and captive clientele.

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, all the legislation in the world and all the regulations in the world will not help us make our environment and economy more competitive if we do not have a government that has the backbone to say no to anti-competitive mergers. There have been a lot of mergers over the last eight years that the Liberal government has approved, and

Government Orders

those mergers have reduced competition in the marketplace here in Canada.

Has the Bloc supported those mergers or does it support a more cautious approach to making sure Canadians have full competition, so the price of groceries and the price of housing go down in this country?

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, competition is for oil companies too. Funny how the price of gas never goes down, only up.

Regulation is not always a cure-all, but it is the right solution in this case because the players are not trustworthy. If they were, we might be inclined to let them self-regulate, but they have shown that that was not good enough, particularly when they refused to answer questions from the Competition Bureau.

I think that the proposed legislation seeks to restore consumer confidence in the bureau's services. I do not believe that there will be a loss of efficiency. I think that we will see increased efficiency, because the players will have no other choice.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as I have pointed out previously, another aspect of the legislation is to increase the number of purpose-built rentals to increase housing supply. What we have witnessed, and I mentioned earlier, is provinces adopting the same policies where they are incorporating sales tax relief to encourage more construction. I am not too sure what the Province of Quebec has done.

Does the member know what the Province of Quebec has done with respect to the GST being forgiven for purpose-built rentals?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I will respond candidly and honestly: I simply do not know.

If my colleague so desires, I can look into it and get back to him later. At this point, I could not say.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, on many occasions I had the fortune or the misfortune to observe that when a member of the Bloc Québécois uses the old expression “it is about time” in the House, most of the time, unfortunately, it is a euphemism. Unsurprisingly, that old saying “it is about time” applies well to the bill before us today.

Currently, when the Competition Bureau studies the competitive environment in a given sector, it cannot compel anyone to testify or order the production of documents. That is not very convenient. However, with the passage of the Bill C-56, it will be able to do so. When I say it is about time, that is because the Bloc has been calling for this measure for a good 20 years.

Government Orders

On the other hand, I would be lying if I said that Bill C-56 did not lack teeth. I will spoil the surprise right away: I will vote in favour of Bill C-56 like my Bloc Québécois colleagues. Here are the reasons why. This bill contains some good measures. Most of all, it does not contain any that are outright harmful. Let us just say that I expected more. For me, this is just a drop in an ocean of needs. Now I will explain my thoughts in greater detail.

Part 1 of Bill C-56 modifies the Excise Tax Act. It extends a GST rebate, 5% of the sales tax, to builders of rental housing. The rebate will occur at the moment of sale or alleged sale if the builder becomes the owner. The rebate does not apply when the purchaser is already entirely or partially exempt. For example, this is the case for government organizations, municipalities, not-for-profit organizations or housing co-ops. That means that Bill C-56 will have no impact on the cost of social or community housing projects because it concerns only private housing.

Part 2 makes three amendments to the Competition Act. The first, as I said earlier, gives real investigative powers to the commissioner of competition. The second broadens the range of anti-competitive practices prohibited by law. At present, competitors cannot agree to push another player out of the market. Bill C-56 will prohibit agreements even with non-market players aimed at reducing competition. For example, when a grocer rents space in a shopping centre, it is common for the lease to contain clauses prohibiting the landlord from renting to another grocer. Such practices that effectively limit competition will be prohibited under Bill C-56.

The third amendment to the Competition Act will make mergers and acquisitions more difficult. Today, when a business wants to buy a competitor, for example the Royal Bank's proposed acquisition of HSBC, the act states that the Competition Bureau should allow the merger if it can be proven that the purchase will result in a gain in efficiency, even if the merger will reduce competition. This provision, which appears to favour concentration, will be repealed by Bill C-56. The Bloc Québécois and my colleague, the member from Terrebonne, have been asking for this measure for some time now.

As I said at the start of my speech, Bill C-56 contains a number of good measures and, more importantly, none that are outright harmful. However, I also said I believe it is but a drop in an ocean of needs.

In housing, there is real urgency. However, nothing indicates Bill C-56 will do anything to reduce rents. It would be astonishing if a landlord dropped rents just because they no longer had to pay the GST on a new property, especially since interest rates alone are driving up mortgage costs. This increase will greatly exceed the GST exemption on new rental units. When landlords renew their mortgage, who will they pass the increase on to? The question is rhetorical. We can expect prices will keep rising, with or without Bill C-56. At best, by removing the tax on rental buildings, Bill C-56 might entice some developers to build rentals instead of condos. It might simply become more profitable for them. Again, this is just speculation.

Although Bill C-56 will not directly affect rents, it could help alleviate the housing shortage in some small measure. If Bill C-56 in-

creases the percentage of new rental housing construction even a little, it will be a good thing. However, we would still be light years away from meeting needs.

I repeat: There are some good things in this bill, such as the amendments to the Competition Act. The Bloc Québécois fully endorses those. On the other hand, we consider it misleading to claim that the bill will help lower the cost of groceries, as the government suggests.

● (1305)

Giving the commissioner of competition real investigative powers when carrying out a study should enable him to get to the bottom of things when it comes to the competitive environment in a given sector. That is very true. Now, learning more about an issue is a good thing, but it does not increase competition and it certainly does not bring down grocery costs.

Since 1986, the vast majority of grocery chains have disappeared, after being bought out by competitors. Steinberg disappeared. A&P disappeared. Provigo was bought by Loblaw's. IGA was bought by Sobeys. Marché Adonis was bought by Metro. Of the 13 grocery chains that existed in 1986, only three remain. If we include the two American big box stores that also sell groceries, Costco and Walmart, that means that five players control 80% of the market.

While it is true that a number of factors are contributing to the increase in food prices, it is important not to lose sight of the grocers' profit margins. When prices go up, profits go up. However, according to the Competition Bureau study published last June, grocers did not just maintain their profit margin, they increased it.

When a merchant can raise prices at will, it is a blatant sign of a lack of competition. The amendments to the Competition Act found in Bill C-56 will certainly prevent the situation from worsening, and they will make mergers and acquisitions harder to do in the future. However, they do not resolve the situation. The damage is done and, unfortunately, Bill C-56 will do nothing to fix it.

In short, even though Bill C-56 does put forward some good measures, this cannot possibly be the government's one and only response to the skyrocketing cost of housing and groceries. When it comes to housing, the government needs to review and improve the national housing strategy, which, let us face it, has failed.

In terms of competition, they need to review the notion of abuse to prevent the big players from endlessly profiting from their disproportionate market share. Those two initiatives must be undertaken, and we are just starting both, whether Bill C-56 passes or not.

To end my speech, I would like to say the following. The Bloc Québécois's support for Bill C-56 is certainly not a motion to congratulate the government, quite the contrary. However, we do see it as a step in the right direction. The Bloc Québécois's support today is like a pat on the back. It is like a nod of the head, but coupled with a "what comes next?"

I suspect that I may have to wait awhile before the government actually takes any further action, but I hope I will not have to wait too long.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully as the member described the steps we are taking as a federal government to try and alleviate some of the pressure in the rental market. The rental market is generally under provincial jurisdiction, which I know the Bloc watches very carefully.

Removing the GST in a time of high interest rates is to try and stimulate construction, create conditions where there are more units to rent and introduce competition in the rental market and, therefore, drive down prices. That is the move we are trying to make as a federal government.

Could the hon. member comment on how creating the right conditions in the market might actually help the people of Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

The problem that we have with this provision, which seeks to eliminate the GST on the construction of rental housing, is that the government is making assumptions. The government is trusting the private sector to bring prices down. It is always a bit risky to trust the private sector to lower prices. There is nothing to guarantee that, once the rental units have been built, private builders will pass those savings on to renters in the form of lower rental costs. The government is making assumptions.

That is why we do not think that this is the answer to the problem we are facing. However, as I said in my speech, this measure could result in the construction of more rental units, which would reduce pressure on the market by increasing availability, but there is no guarantee of that. The government is hoping that is what will happen if it implements this measure, but we are not convinced that it will have such a major impact on lowering rent. In fact, we are not convinced that that will happen at all. That being said, we will not vote against Bill C-56, because it contains good measures and nothing harmful.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, for the most part, I agree with my colleague's observations and analysis.

I am not suggesting that removing the GST from rental housing construction is a bad measure. It was one of our proposals as well. However, I agree that this measure alone is not going to solve the housing crisis that has been going on since 1994, when the federal government completely pulled out of building truly affordable social housing.

Government Orders

I would like to hear his thoughts about the fact that the real solution is non-market housing, such as co-ops, community housing, student housing and, most importantly, social housing.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and I generally agree on that.

Quebec is a unique ecosystem. In fact, we call that a distinct society, a nation. The co-operative system is rather unique in Quebec, at least in terms of the number of co-operatives that exist in Quebec.

Housing falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec. Social and affordable housing requires funding. As usual, Ottawa knows best and it is interfering in a jurisdiction that is not its responsibility. The federal government does not have the expertise, but it has the money because of the fiscal imbalance and because all of the revenues are in Ottawa and all the expenses are in Quebec and the provinces.

We are asking Ottawa to send money to Quebec, the provinces and the territories who have the expertise in affordable and social housing. Then things will go much smoother. That being said, there is an even more radical solution that would be even better and would practically solve everything: if the federal government stayed out of Quebec and we had all the power over such matters. If we were a country, the housing situation would be lot better.

• (1315)

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-56 once again and maybe take a stab at addressing some of the issues that have come up in debate. I will start just by saying, first of all, that New Democrats, of course, support this legislation.

What we said at the beginning in respect to housing was that it is good to increase supply but that it is not just any increase in supply that is going to help with the housing crisis. We have to be concerned about the various kinds of housing along the way and ensure that we are increasing supply in all parts of the housing spectrum where there is need. Of course, there is a need for more market-based, purpose-built rental and eliminating the GST off purpose-built rental is a way to incent the development of more market rent apartments. This will be great for Canadians who can afford market rent, which is certainly a smaller percentage of Canadians than it was just a short time ago. Nevertheless, for those who can afford it, are looking for it and cannot find it, more market supply will certainly be helpful.

Government Orders

However, we cannot wash our hands of the issue and think that the work is done simply because we have brought in a measure to incent the development of more market-based housing. A lot of other Canadians out there will not be able to access that market housing; nevertheless, they need to be housed, deserve to be housed and, as far as I am concerned, should have an enforceable right to be housed in Canada. That is why, from the word go, when this bill was introduced, New Democrats said that this on its own would not be enough. We want to see the government accompany this legislation with some measures for development of non-market housing, which does not always mean affordable or social housing. Non-market housing can be provided at market rents. We see that in some co-ops that choose to offer market rent suites to those who can afford them and, at the same time, offer some affordable rents or social rents, where rent is actually geared to folks' income. Therefore, it is only ever a percentage of their income. It does not eat up the entirety of a household's budget.

All this is to say that incenting more market supply is not enough. This bill would do that. It is one component of addressing the housing crisis. There is a lot more to do. New Democrats were certainly disappointed in the fall economic statement for not having been more ambitious on that front. There was a billion dollars announced for a replenishment of the coinvestment fund, but the fact that this replenishment does not come until 2025 is a serious issue. I think it is a sign that the government still does not understand the extent to which we need to confront the housing crisis in Canada with a serious sense of urgency.

Other housing that we need to look at, whether market or non-market, is housing to be able to address the concerns of many indigenous communities across Canada. I just want to take a moment to recognize the good work that my colleagues from Nunavut have done, both the current member for Nunavut and Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, who was the MP for Nunavut in the last Parliament. She spent a considerable amount of time travelling through her riding, the territory of Nunavut, documenting the serious housing need there: the overcrowding, the mould and the dilapidated condition of a lot of housing that has been built. I think it is important to note that taking the GST off purpose-built rental is not going to do a thing for folks in Nunavut and small remote communities, where there is not an abundance of contractors waiting to build housing. They are not looking to go there as a market.

We have talked a lot about the competition space, whether it is telecoms, grocery companies, banks, fossil fuel companies, where we have these oligopolies that have developed in Canada. Members can just name the market. We can talk about better competition policy until we are blue in the face. If we are talking about grocery prices at the one grocery store in a rural community where people have to drive hundreds of kilometres just to get to the next grocery store, the fact is that improving the competition framework is not going to do a lot in respect to pricing in a community like that. Taking the GST off purpose-built rental is not going to do a lot to incent the development of new housing in small and remote communities in Nunavut. That is why we have to go outside just thinking about the market and how to incent market players. What do we hope they will do? It is not profitable in the way that they are used to making profit in a place such as Toronto, Vancouver or even Winnipeg or Halifax.

• (1320)

It is not profitable to build up there, and folks certainly do not have the money to pay to make it profitable for somebody to build up there. However, we need people to do so. That is why we need good public policy that is not dependent on just trying to provide little carrots for profit-seeking companies in the market.

It is not that they are doing anything wrong. They are not bad people for not wanting to move their business from downtown Toronto, where they develop condos, to Nunavut and start building appropriate housing for people in small, remote northern communities.

We should not expect people to do that all on their own; however, one needs public policy in the context of a strategy that includes addressing workforce needs and training up local people to have skills. Such a strategy includes having the funding required, when they are done building homes in one community, to move that infrastructure and the people to the next community to do some of that building and to share those skills. It also includes having what amounts to an economic development plan that is about putting indigenous people back in charge of their own communities while ensuring that they have the resources to do something with their skills as they develop them.

The market is not going to do that. It is not meant to do that, nor is it interested in doing that.

We get up and talk a lot about these things. People say that we do not care about entrepreneurs, business or risk-taking. That is not true, but we understand the limits of it.

There is an intellectual and administrative laziness that permeates the Liberal and Conservative parties, where they would rather just pretend as though somehow, if one gives the market enough of a free hand, it will fix all these problems. It is not true.

The market is not designed to fix certain kinds of problems. Sometimes, the very problems that it is not designed to fix are some of the most important problems. The people who, not wrongly, but we all make choices, decide to live their life seeking profit in the market are not interested in solving these problems, because there is no money to be made in solving them in that way. However, they are life and death problems.

The problem of housing in Nunavut is killing people right now. It is making it impossible for them to get an education. We have heard stories about schools built in indigenous communities that were not even open for six months before they got shut down. A shoddy job was done of building the school, and they ended up having structural problems with the school right away. We were just talking about this last week.

Government Orders

If a child is fortunate enough to have a school, and they go to school, come back and try to do homework, but their home was built for five people and houses 15, we can be damn sure that this child is going to struggle to get their homework done. If they have to sleep in shifts because there are not enough bedrooms for people to go and lie down, the child will struggle to focus on learning.

We know that, even in major centres, kids in school right now are having a hard time concentrating. This happens more and more as Canadians struggle to afford food, because the kids do not have a full belly.

This is why New Democrats have been supporting the idea of a national school food program.

I am proud to say that this is a priority of the new government in Manitoba, and I look forward to it getting done. I do not think it should have to do it on its own. I think the federal government should be at the table doing that. We have heard a lot of words, but we have not seen a lot of action. We certainly have not seen any funding for that.

We need to get on with that. If we want people to succeed, if we want the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” language to make any sense at all, it has to be in a world where people have the resources to be able to do that.

As a starting point, they have to be housed. They have to be fed. Their parents cannot be working three jobs just to make ends meet and never be around to have any time to provide support or direction.

These are some things that the market is not going to do for us. That is not what it is there for. It is all well and good for people who are well resourced, whose children have opportunities and who are well-supported, to say, “We did it. Why can't everybody else?”

The fact of the matter is that there are so many more children who can do it and would do it if they had the right start and just a little bit of those resources that so many of us have the privilege of being able to take for granted.

● (1325)

I say yes to eliminating GST from purpose-built rental, but we cannot then pretend that the work is done. I think the fall economic statement betrayed that the government does think that the work is done and that it can take its sweet time getting around to the rest of it. The government thinks it can say to the territorial government in Nunavut that if it wants money for housing, it will have to apply to the indigenous government that it already gave money to, failing to recognize that they serve different populations. There is a lot of overlap, but their mandates are not the same. Indigenous governments should get money to provide housing to people in their communities, but not in lieu of territorial governments getting resources to build housing in those communities. The deficit of affordable housing is large enough that we need both of these organizations, if they are willing, to be working together to try to meet the housing need.

We need to start addressing some of these things, just as we need to address some of the larger infrastructure required in order to build the housing. I think of the Kivalliq Hydro-Fibre Link, for in-

stance, which, if built, would deliver power to a community in Nunavut, as well as a mine. It is an important thing we could do, both to incent economic development in the region and also to make it possible to build housing. There is no point in building a house in the 21st century for somebody who does not have electricity. We need to find a way to get power to communities even as we think about building more housing in those communities.

I talked before a little about what I think is a kind of intellectual laziness and an administrative laziness, by which I mean governments that do not want to do the hard public policy work of developing an effective strategy, funding it and resourcing it. Let us be frank; I think we tend to dismiss the work of public administration. However, it is important to be able to have a plan and line up all the players, which includes market players. For instance, we are not going to have a housing strategy that does not involve talking to the people who build the homes. I am an electrician by trade. There is a lot of good information that can be gleaned from the people who actually do the work, as opposed to talking just to the engineers or the estimators.

To put together a public strategy like that, to bring all of those pieces together, takes a lot of time and a lot of work. It is also a unique set of skills that we do not necessarily see everywhere else. That is why courses in public administration are offered. For too long, there has been a prevailing attitude, in both of the parties that have governed since the mid-1990s, when they cancelled the national housing strategy, that we are here just to make it easy for the guys in the market to take care of it all, and that if cannot be taken care of by the market, it is not for us to worry about.

It is quite the contrary; that is exactly the thing that people in government should be worried about. It is exactly the job of government to take care of some of the very important things that the market will not take care of. However, first of all, we have to accept and admit that the market will not take care of every need if it is left to its own devices. Thankfully there is a lot of overlap between what one can make a lot of money at and providing services to people in good ways. We see that in many facets of our economy; small and medium-sized businesses, particularly, are very good at identifying gaps in the services in their local communities, and developing a product and selling it at a fair price. When we look at some of the larger companies, like telecom companies, oil and gas companies and banks, that is not what is going on. Even though they make a lot of money and benefit greatly from a public policy environment designed to help them make their money and defend their interests and power in the economy, they do not accept any reciprocal responsibility.

Government Orders

There are only three big Canadian grocery chains. Do they accept any responsibility for providing groceries at an affordable price to Canadians? No, it is very clear they do not see that as their job. Just take a look at the work that my colleague, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford has done, asking difficult questions of grocery CEOs at the agriculture committee. They made it pretty clear that they accept no responsibility. They have a completely privileged position in that market. Food is something Canadians cannot decide to do without. The CEOs accept no reciprocal sense of responsibility to Canadians for that.

We can look at oil and gas companies that have been making money hand over fist lately, even while laying off more employees. Do the Canadian oil and gas companies think that they need to do anything to try to reduce the cost at the pump? Absolutely they do not. They see an opportunity. They see that they have a captive market. To the extent that they can push prices up, they certainly have been doing so.

• (1330)

Between 2019 and 2022, oil and gas profits in Canada rose by 1000%. This is not an industry that accepts any responsibility for the privileged position it occupies and the power that comes with it in the Canadian economy. The idea that we are going to leave it all to the market is, I think, a false idea, but unfortunately it has been the predominant idea for at least 30 years in Canada. We can trace it back at least to the original free trade agreement debate in 1988 and the years leading up to that. This is relevant to the point of competition, I would say. My Conservative and Liberal colleagues usually argue about who is the greatest supporter of corporate free trade.

It is interesting to watch, after the Conservatives voted against the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement most recently, how the argument goes. We see that the Conservatives voted against the trade agreement for no good reason I can identify except to make everything about the carbon tax. That includes things that are not about it, like a conflict half a world away that has everything to do with the preservation of democracy. Instead of taking that seriously on its own terms, they would rather make it about the carbon tax for their own domestic political needs. That is a sign of a government that does not have our back. It has been interesting to watch Conservatives try to defend their position as the greatest defenders of corporate free trade while voting against that trade agreement.

It has been interesting to watch the Liberals not just zero in on the Ukraine issue but also see this as their opportunity to establish themselves as the biggest champion of corporate free trade in the Canadian political space. That has been fascinating, because the thing about free trade is that it was supposed to bring us lower prices. I just heard a Conservative member talk about how there are only five big grocery companies in Canada, three Canadian ones and two American ones. He talked about how he wants more Canadian companies. That was the argument New Democrats were making in the free trade debate: that if we opened up the economy, what we would end up with is Americans coming over and taking over essential industries. Just watch.

There are Conservatives who believe we should deregulate the air industry and invite American airlines into Canadian spaces as a

way to lower prices and improve service. Just wait until it happens; they are going to be singing the same crocodile tears song 20 years after it happens that they are singing now about grocery companies, as if anyone should believe them. Either we are of the point of view that we can take a strategic approach to certain pillars of our economy and believe that we need the tools at our disposal to protect those things and conduct business in a certain way, or we believe that we should open it up completely to competition and free trade agreements and even give foreign companies the right to sue the Canadian government, which is what Conservative and Liberal governments have done when they have tried to have a strategic economic approach.

Conservatives get up and cry foul, not just on groceries but also on the battery plant jobs and on workers coming in. Do they know how they are coming in? They are not coming in through the temporary foreign worker program, for the most part, although we would not know that when listening to the Conservatives. What is interesting on that point too is that the TFW program blew up under the Conservatives' watch and then had to be fixed because it had become such an exploitation of foreign workers. The workers are coming in under international labour mobility provisions negotiated in free trade agreements by the Conservatives. At the time, when we asked them if they knew that would mean that multinational companies were going to import foreign workforces when there is a big investment in Canada, they said that it would not happen, that they would just bring in supervisors who were going to help share some specific expertise and then move along. The jury is out on whether that is what is happening in the battery plants. The government owes Canadians a better answer and more guarantees for what it is doing for their tax dollars. The fact of the matter is that it is just egregious for Conservatives to get up and pretend they do not know how those international labour mobility provisions work or that they did not negotiate them.

I look forward to talking more about these things in the Q and A.

• (1335)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech. I noted, when he was talking about the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, that he was positioning it as though the government's position were to somehow one-up the Conservatives with respect to our commitments to free trade.

Government Orders

I have been very vocal on this issue. For me, this is not about bringing attention to one side's being better than the other on free trade; rather, the whole issue of the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement is to suggest that Canadians look into why it is that Conservatives have taken this position. I believe it is because they are moving so far to the right that we are now seeing an all-right influence from the United States, the pro-Russian propaganda they are buying into. Would he agree with me that this is a shared concern that he and his NDP colleagues have?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, as I said, what is important is that the conflict be judged on its merits and that Canada take a position to support Ukraine, because I do think that is an important front for freedom and democracy in the world right now, and Russia cannot be allowed to win. The effort to try to make it about something else, like the carbon tax, to suit the domestic political needs of the Conservatives is short-sighted, and I think it is wrong. There is a serious question to be asked about why they do not see that and why it is not decisive for them.

We can think about the time that Canadian Conservatives spend with the Republicans across the border talking about political strategy and about how to implement a common agenda for North America, and about the prominence of Donald Trump in the Republican movement and the fact that he was bought and paid for by the Russians a long time ago and has been influencing the Republican Party, which is not to let any of the Republicans themselves off the hook, to diminish support for Ukraine. I think that there are some real questions we should be asking about the Canadian Conservative connection to that movement.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague opposite, but there seem to be a lot of conspiracy theories flying around the chamber about the Conservatives' view of Ukraine. We have been clear that we support Ukraine. We already have a free trade agreement with Ukraine. Ukraine has asked for more munitions and weapons; the liberals and the NDP voted against that. The Liberals have also not given the LNG that Ukraine is asking for. Certainly, I think it would be good to look at the record of the members opposite on that file.

However, the current debate is about affordability. Instantly, if the Liberals and the NDP both cared about affordability for Canadians, they could axe the tax that is going to be quadrupled and the tax on that tax.

Why is the member standing and supporting the Liberal government to drive people into poverty?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I have supported carbon pricing consistently from the time I was nominated, right through all three elections in which I have been elected in Elmwood—Transcona, so there has been no change of position on my part. I am happy to answer to the electors in Elmwood—Transcona any time on that issue, and I have already three times.

However, when it comes to the question of Ukraine, I just watched, on Friday morning, the Conservative caucus that bothered to show up and vote, because they did not all bother to vote and the record will show that, but of the ones who did—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, the member well knows we are not supposed to point out absence or presence in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Well, Madam Speaker, there were a lot of Conservatives absent. We are not talking about an individual.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, to finish my point of order, if we were able to reflect on who was or was not here, we could easily reflect on that party, the NDP, whose members were not here either, or members of the Liberal Party as well.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, it is very clear to see that between midnight and 6 a.m., fewer than 49% of the Conservatives were actually voting.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): This is starting to cause disorder in the House. The hon. member did not quite indicate specific individuals who were not in the House, but I do want to remind members that if it is causing disorder in the House, then I would ask members to refrain from that.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

● (1340)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I do apologize, I should not have used the term “show up”. What I was referring to was the public voting record. No number of points of order are going to change the public voting record, and if Canadians consult the record, they will see that many Conservatives did not vote through the whole voting marathon.

However, the point stands that the Conservatives who did vote voted against \$500 million in military aid to Ukraine. On three occasions, they voted against funding for Operation Unifier, and on a separate occasion, they voted against funding for the emergency assistance for folks who want to leave Ukraine and come to Canada. If we add up all of what they voted against, the baseline is \$500 million, but I believe it is almost \$1 billion in aid to Ukraine. That is after they voted against the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, which President Zelenskyy asked us to vote for. His ambassador to Canada has expressed disappointment that there was not a unanimous vote. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress has written a letter to the Conservative leader, also expressing disappointment not only on the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement but also on the Conservative votes last week against funding. Therefore, let us not pretend that somehow I am making something up. I will take no lessons about conspiracy theories from the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

Government Orders

Many of us in the House believe that the GST rebate for rental property builders will not really have any impact on the availability and affordability of housing. If the results are questionable, how does my colleague explain the government proposing that this be spread over seven or even 12 years for the final reimbursement, until December 31, 2035, to be exact? I would like his opinion on that.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, as I said, I believe it is appropriate to introduce targeted measures for the market, but not in a context where the work is not being done to ensure that housing is being built and that the necessary resources are available for not-for-profit organizations that have a mandate to build other kinds of housing.

I think this government has a habit of focusing on what amount to market mechanisms and ignoring its responsibility to invest in non-market housing. The government's highest duty lies precisely in that type of housing, because the other players in the economy will not be interested in that type of housing, which does not make a lot of money.

Yes, we can build more housing that turns a profit, but the government must also focus on non-market housing.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Elmwood—Transcona for his speech and also for his interventions with other members of this House. We have been studying this issue in depth at the agriculture committee and I have had the chance to question multiple CEOs; notably Galen Weston of Loblaw.

The problem is that we can see the data and everyone talks about small margins in the grocery sector. The fact of the matter is that the margins have actually doubled since the pandemic and the grocery chains are making record profits and they do have gross amounts of executive pay. Mr. Weston's compensation is 431 times the average salary of his employees. We know from unions representing grocery workers that in many cases those workers cannot afford to shop where they work. None of the CEOs could tell me how many of their employees are using food banks to get by.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the fact that through both Liberals and Conservatives we have a policy, over the last 40 years, of too much corporate deference in this country and not enough hard analysis of how we are letting corporations get away with this. Canadians are being asked to shoulder the blame while corporations are continuing to make a lot of money off their backs.

• (1345)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, my colleague has done so much work on this. Canadians do see that they have just a handful of companies that largely control their access to food, which is something they cannot just decide to do without, and that the leadership of those companies do not feel any sense of responsibility for their incredible money-making power, which has grown, as the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford has pointed out, over the last number of years. The leadership of the companies do not

have any sense of responsibility for the fact that they are the ones who control the food.

This is not just another product on the market. This is Canadians' access to the basic necessities of life. The companies have been allowed to do that for exactly the reason that my colleague identified, which is a sense of deference: If they are a big company, they must be doing something right and we do not want to get in their way. However, we have to do better in Canada than to allow a handful of companies that control our access to food to single-mindedly pursue the highest return to their shareholders, because it is Canadians who are getting burned.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak on Bill C-56. It is yet another initiative the government is taking to support Canadians. From virtually day one, through the introduction of legislation and taking budgetary measures, as a government we have been very supportive of having the backs of Canadians, whether with the very first piece of legislation we introduced back in 2015-16 regarding a tax break for Canada's middle class or the many support programs put together during the pandemic that ensured small businesses and Canadians had the disposable income and supports necessary for Canada to do as well as it has. This was done through a team Canada approach, not only getting us out of the pandemic but putting our economy in a great position to do exceptionally well going forward.

This is reflected in one of the most important stats I believe we have, which is regarding employment. Employment numbers are very encouraging, especially when we compare Canada to other jurisdictions particularly in the G20 or the G7. Relatively speaking, Canada is doing quite well. It does not mean we let up. It means we need to continue to recognize the issues Canadians are facing on a daily basis, which is what Bill C-56 is all about.

Bill C-56 would be there to support Canadians. Before I speak about Bill C-56, I want to recognize this week is a very important week, because we are doing the formal expansion of the dental program. This will allow for seniors and people with disabilities to participate in the dental program, which is going to help literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians. Again, this is a very progressive move. It is a move that clearly demonstrates there are elements with the House of Commons today, contrary to the Conservatives', that are there to provide more hope and opportunities for Canadians.

Government Orders

Bill C-56 would, in essence, do a couple of things. I want to focus on two points. First and foremost is the issue of competition. Changes would be made to the Competition Act that would ensure we have more competition here in Canada going forward. For example, it would get rid of the efficiencies argument. The efficiencies argument is something corporations have used in the past in order to justify taking over large businesses. The one I have often made reference to is a very good example because it is relative to the debates and discussions we have had for a number of months now. It is about the price of groceries, the concerns over that and the steps being taken, whether by the Minister of Finance or the standing committee calling the big five grocery companies to come to Ottawa to be held more accountable for their actions. I see this as a positive thing.

Bill C-56 would provide more of an opportunity to ensure healthier competition into the future. The best example I can come up with offhand is when the current leader of the Conservative Party sat around the cabinet table of Stephen Harper and that government actually approved the Loblaws purchase of Shoppers Drug Mart. For individuals watching or listening in to the debate, I invite them to visit a Shoppers Drug Mart, where they will see a great deal of food products. We are talking about a multi-billion-dollar deal that took away competition. I do not know all of the arguments that were used at the time, but what I do know is that was the last time we saw such a major acquisition of a grocery line. I would suggest that was not healthy for Canadians, and we are starting to see that today.

• (1350)

We are now down to five major grocery stores and we are looking at having a grocery code of conduct. We need to establish that certain behaviours are not acceptable. I was pleased when Canada Bread actually got a fine through the courts. It was tens of millions of dollars because of price fixing. We need to ensure the Competition Bureau has teeth for this type of thing. Not only does it get rid of the efficiency argument, but it also increases the opportunity for fines and gives it more power to conduct investigations. That would make a positive difference. I think all members of the House should support this legislation.

The other part to the legislation is something that I believe would make a huge difference. We know housing is an issue in Canada. Never before have we seen a national government invest as much in housing as we have with this Prime Minister and this government. We are talking about historic levels of funding. This is in terms of our involvement, support and encouragement in housing, like non-profits, and that is what Bill C-56 would do. It would encourage the growth of purpose-built rentals. These things would have a huge impact. We are talking tens of thousands of new units. The policy is so sound that provinces are also looking at engaging with the provincial sales tax component. They realize this is a good way to ensure we build purpose-built rentals.

Ironically, as has been pointed out, the Conservative Party has taken a position that is very anti-housing. When the current leader of the Conservative Party was responsible for housing in Canada, it was an absolute disaster. The federal government did not do its work back then and that is very clear by the actions, or lack of actions, from the Conservative Party. He might say he was just fol-

lowing Stephen Harper's orders. Maybe that is his excuse. However, on Thursday going into Friday, there was a voting marathon. There was a vote dealing with housing and ensuring that the money would go to supporting over 80,000 new apartments, including an affordable home component. The Conservative Party members who showed up to vote actually voted no to that measure. That reinforces that the Conservative Party of Canada, under its current leadership, does not support housing.

When Conservative members raise issues about housing, they have zero credibility on that file. Never before have we had a government that has demonstrated as much leadership in working with municipalities and provinces, and invested more financial resources than this government in the history of Canada. On the other side, we have an incompetent Conservative leader who was a disaster when he was the minister responsible for housing. When there is such a huge demand, what does the Conservative Party do? The members who decide to vote, show up and vote against supporting housing. They are oozing with hypocrisy. Unfortunately, that example is not alone. I was listening to the back and forth, and the questions that were being asked.

• (1355)

Consistently, this government has recognized the importance of Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be part of it. We want an economy that is going to work for all Canadians in all regions. That is the reason we have invested so much energy into trade. Trade supports all of us.

It is surprising, when we think of affordability, that the Conservatives voted against the trade agreement. I have talked a great deal about that, the principles of trade and how important it is that we get behind the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement. Hopefully I will get more time to focus on that in a while, but I was shocked to see the Conservatives not once, not twice, but on three occasions vote against financial supports for Ukraine. There were votes on individual lines, and they voted against Ukraine once again.

It is a consistent policy with the Conservative Party. Whether on housing or trade, the Conservative Party is reckless in its policy development. A number of Conservatives have stood today on this legislation and talked about affordability. We recognize affordability. That is why we brought in the grocery rebate. That is why we have legislation such as this, which will have a positive impact. What is the Conservative Party's policy? It is very simple. It is a bumper sticker that says, "Axe the tax".

The Conservatives' whole concept of axing the tax is stealing money from Canadians. That is what they are doing, because most Canadians get more money back than they pay for the price on—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would remind members there will be 10 minutes of questions and comments. If members have something to say, they should wait until then.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Statements by Members

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let us think about it. They are saying they are going to get rid—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for North Okanagan—Shuswap is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, I believe the language the member used is unparliamentary. We cannot say indirectly what we cannot say directly. He basically stated that Conservatives are stealing from taxpayers. I would ask him to withdraw that statement and apologize.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, if they take away the rebate, they are taking money out of the pockets of Canadians. Many would say that is taking away—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): This is a debate. I would remind members that they cannot say indirectly what they cannot say directly.

If the hon. member would withdraw his comment, we will go to Statements by Members and he can continue his speech later.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I withdraw it.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

RECONCILIATION

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week, instead of voting to support over \$20 million in investments for first nations children, the official opposition prioritized filibustering Parliament for over 30 hours. Through these actions, Conservatives said loud and clear that political theatre was more important to them than the continued transfer and control of child and family services and laws to first nations communities.

Unlike the leader of the official opposition, who cares only about first nations when it suits his needs, we believe in furthering progress toward self-determination. We will not let childish antics get in the way of providing the tools and support needed for first nations to act on what is best for their children, families and communities.

Enough is enough. On this side of the House, we will do what is required to right the wrongs of the past and move forward together in true reconciliation.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, today, we remember the real reason for the season.

C is for the Christ child who was born in Bethlehem that first Christmas night.

H is for the hope for all humanity that came down to us.

R is for the fact that there was no room in the inn for Him. The question remains: Is there room for Him in our world and hearts today?

I is for Immanuel, which means “God is with us”, and He is indeed with us through whatever we are going through and will be with us until the end.

S is for the shepherds, commoners, farmers and keepers of the flock, who were the first to be entrusted with the great news of His birth.

T is for the three wise men, who came searching for the newborn king of Israel. The wise still seek Him today.

M is for the fact that He makes all things new again.

A is for all, because the promise of Christmas is for all people everywhere.

S is for the Saviour, who frees the whole world and every individual from fear, sin, shame and sadness, and as a result, a weary world rejoices.

From my family to others and to all Canadians, merry Christmas and happy new year.

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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our women entrepreneurship strategy is reshaping the entrepreneurial landscape in Canada. With \$7 billion in investments spanning over 20 federal departments, the program is not just a gesture; it is a resounding declaration that we recognize the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs.

In my community of Halifax West, funding empowers the Centre for Women in Business to continue its work fostering women-led businesses. With the nearly 9,000 loans this program has already provided, we are helping women realize their dreams and break down the barriers to their success. The data shows that women are jumping at the chance to access these resources, connect with mentors and further their education.

Women have their place in the world of entrepreneurship, and we will continue to hand them the tools they need to make their mark. While the Leader of the Opposition forces his caucus to vote against the program, we will always be there to empower women across the country.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week, more than 1,000 farmers took to the streets of Quebec City to ask for more government support.

Farmers need help to deal with climate change, and yet Canada is investing almost four times less money than the United States and the European Union to support our people.

This puts our farmers at a disadvantage, creates unfair competition and jeopardizes our food security.

For a G7 country that says it wants to feed the whole world, things are off to a bad start. If we want our farmers to feed us, they need to be able to make a living from their trade without having to work a job on the side to make ends meet.

The Bloc Québécois is echoing the message from Quebec's farm businesses loud and clear. The federal government must come up with a plan, a direction and a vision, especially for risk sharing.

Feeding our people is a societal undertaking. Our farmers are central to the solution.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, we watched the Conservatives join together to vote against agriculture. When we say that we support our farmers, we have to walk the talk.

They voted against an investment program for our dairy farmers and processors; they voted against our agricultural producers; they voted against the on-farm climate action fund; and they voted against funding for implementing the Indo-Pacific agri-food office, which we know would benefit our agri-food exporters.

The behaviour of the leader of the official opposition does not surprise me. When he had the chance to stand up for our farmers at the cabinet table, he chose to remain seated and support a \$200-million cut.

The leader of the Conservative Party is not worth the risk. When the time comes to support our farmers, he is not worth a nickel.

* * *

● (1405)

[*English*]

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to recognize a trailblazer in the County of Newell, Garnet Altwasser, for his recent induction into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame, adding another accolade after having been previously inducted into the Alberta Agriculture Hall of Fame. A founding director of the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, Garnet became a leader in Canadian agri-food production after establishing Lakeside Farm Industries in the County of Newell, growing it into the largest single-site feed operation and one of the largest beef processing plants in Canada.

He has always been humble and has not sought recognition. I can say that his influence on Alberta's agriculture industry is second to none and is leading investment to the advancement of Canadian ag. It is thanks to people like Garnet Altwasser that makes Alberta agriculture world class.

Statements by Members

Congratulations to Garnet Altwasser for his worthy induction to the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame. I thank him for helping to feed Canadians and the world with Alberta beef.

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SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMS

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's priority is ensuring every child receives the best possible start in life. Building a national school food policy that provides conditions for children to succeed not only in school but over a lifetime is incredibly important. School food programs play a vital role in strengthening education and health. I thank food banks across Canada that are working hard to keep our communities fed and organizations like Food4Kids in the Waterloo region.

Last week, it was disappointing to see Conservatives vote no to my colleague, the MP for Acadie—Bathurst, and his proposal to lay the groundwork for a national school food program. Not a single Conservative voted in favour. I hope Canadians are paying attention to the Conservatives and their attempts to block work toward children receiving nutritious food at school.

Let us rededicate ourselves to ensuring a brighter future for our kids, not only in my community of Kitchener South—Hespeler but all throughout our incredible nation.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from coast to coast continue to feel the effects of climate change. While our government is putting forth important funding to move forward on our environmental agenda, Conservatives want to reverse our government's progress and put us in reverse on fighting climate change.

Last week, they voted against \$10 million in funding for restoration efforts for damaged infrastructure from hurricane Fiona. They voted against \$6 million in funding to support amendments to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. They voted against support for Parks Canada to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in those operations. They also voted against the oceans protection plan.

What Conservatives showed Canadians last week is that they continue to deny the fact that climate change is having serious and real impacts on Canadian families and Canadian industry. The Conservatives will put an axe to every single funding measure for the environment and fighting climate change.

*Statements by Members***BARRIE AND DISTRICT CHRISTMAS CHEER**

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is right around the corner and many families in Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte are struggling with the high cost of living. Residents can thankfully turn to their local food banks and other great community programs over the Christmas season to help put food on the table and gifts under the tree.

I want to highlight one charity in particular. Barrie and District Christmas Cheer provides toys and food for over 1,700 families in need in my community. Stephen Quenneville, president of Christmas Cheer, recently stated that he has seen a surge in applications compared to previous years and it is only the beginning of December. Barrie and District Christmas Cheer relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers and donations to ensure that these families in need have a magical Christmas.

Along with food and toys, Barrie and District Christmas Cheer is accepting monetary donations. They can be made directly through its website or at its Santa's workshop, which is located at 49 Truman Road and will be open for in-person drop-offs starting today, December 11.

I want to thank all the volunteers at these charities for their tireless work. Please know that if anyone needs assistance during these challenging times, Christmas Cheer will be there to help.

From my family to others, I want to wish everyone a very merry Christmas, happy holidays and a happy new year.

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ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe what I saw here last Thursday evening. Every member of the Conservative Party voted against ACOA, the Atlantic Canada opportunities agency. It is as shocking as it is disappointing. Nothing has changed, and it seems like the Conservatives still do not care about Atlantic Canada. It is a painful reminder of how our region was neglected under the Harper Conservatives, and not just ignored but dismissed.

ACOA is a crucial institution for us. It invests in local businesses, encourages innovation and creates jobs. It is a lifeline for our communities, offering hope and positive transformations, from revived fisheries to growing tech ventures.

Last year alone, ACOA invested in 3,042 small businesses and community projects. This investment helped create or maintain over 8,600 jobs. However, the reckless Conservatives want to cut ACOA funding and take us back to the time when Atlantic Canada was an afterthought. ACOA's support is key to building a strong and sustainable future for the people of our region.

* * *

● (1410)

ETHICS

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government forcing Canadians to pay the price for their policies, we see that the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost.

It seems that the only ones doing well these days are Liberal insiders, high-paid lobbyists and the super-rich elites, all when regular Canadians are falling behind and being forced to cut out the essentials.

The Prime Minister has faced multiple ethics investigations himself. Members of his cabinet seem to be embroiled in new scandals daily, and Liberal appointees are protecting people who have funnelled hundreds of thousands of dollars for their own personal gain. In desperation, we have the Liberals, along with their coalition NDP partners, refusing to hold those responsible accountable, and have gone as far as to silence whistle-blowers who have spoken up about the recent revelations around the green slush fund, which has been called a sponsorship-level scandal.

It is time for the Prime Minister, his cabinet and everyone involved in this scandal to come clean, so we can get answers on why \$200,000 went to Liberal insiders.

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CARBON TAX

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families in my community of Kelowna—Lake Country are looking forward to Christmas, but they are increasingly concerned about the cost of Christmas dinner.

The NDP-Liberal government's high tax, inflationary deficit-spending agenda has caused food prices to skyrocket. Food bank usage in Canada is higher than ever before. A food bank in my community has seen Christmas hamper sign-ups increase by 32% over last year, and they are expecting a 100% additional increase in demand over the next few months. Food banks themselves have been hit with higher prices on the food they purchase. Canada's Food Price Report 2024 predicts that the average family will spend \$700 more on food in 2024. The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

After eight years, his carbon tax, as it flows through the entire food supply chain, has proven to directly make food more expensive. Will the Prime Minister finally cancel his carbon tax so Canadians can have a meal to share with their families this Christmas?

Statements by Members

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, we spent more than 30 hours voting in the House. The Conservatives voted against a salary increase for members of the Canadian Armed Forces, against \$500 million in military aid for Ukraine and against funding for Canada's military operations here and abroad.

The Conservatives have no problem and no shame voting against our armed forces and the support they need to accomplish the difficult tasks we ask of them.

One thing is clear: On this side of the House, we will defend our troops, our allies, our partners and Ukraine, even if the Conservatives will not.

* * *

[English]

LOCAL PHARMACY

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, locally owned and operated small businesses are the cornerstones of so many communities.

In London, East Enders know they will receive incredible care from a good neighbour at Coulter's Pharmacy. In 1973, Tex Coulter and his partner, Bob Yates founded the pharmacy. Scott Coulter took over the family business in 2000 when his father retired, and the pharmacy celebrated its 50th anniversary this year.

During the pandemic, Scott and his incredible team served our community and got vaccines to folks. They found solutions for families when child cold medications hit an unprecedented shortage, and as the opioid crisis hits the most vulnerable in our community, Coulter's is there, providing naloxone kits without question. Coulter's also provides leadership, whether it is as a member of the Argyle BIA, through supporting minor hockey in being an official partner of the London Knights, or through its annual toy drive in support of the Salvation Army.

We thank Coulter's Pharmacy for their past, present and future service to our community.

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● (1415)

[Translation]

RÉMY GIRARD

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Québec Cinéma gala took place yesterday. This year, Stéphane Lafleur's *Viking* took home a whole bouquet of Iris awards. The evening was also an opportunity to rename the people's choice award after Michel Côté, who died last year. There could be no better choice. This gala also recognized a Québec cinema great for his life's work and, in a way, corrected an injustice.

Rémy Girard, the Québec actor with the most impressive resumé of his generation and Denys Arcand's actor of choice since *The Decline of the American Empire*, has never won an award in Québec for his acting roles. He did not win an award for playing Rémy in

The Decline of the American Empire, Stan in *Les Boys* or Tom in *And the Birds Rained Down*.

For someone who was able to play an unfaithful university professor and a garage league hockey team coach just as convincingly, while adding his own flair to every one of his roles, this lifetime achievement award is very well deserved.

Congratulations to Rémy Girard on an incredible career.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, Canadians face a grim choice under the NDP-Liberal government: keeping their homes warm or putting food on the table. With the Prime Minister's plan to quadruple the carbon tax, costs for gas, groceries and home heating are set to soar.

This is not just a concern of a few. Leaders from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and now the Northwest Territories are demanding carbon tax exemptions. These premiers represent the concerns of almost 60% of Canadians, and many more across Canada share in their frustration. This tax is hitting Canadians hard, from families to first nations, which are now taking legal action against the Liberal government. The burden on farmers will be equally devastating.

The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost. Will the Prime Minister cancel his plan to quadruple the tax on families, first nations and farmers for good?

* * *

LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Conservative Party was the minister responsible for housing, he was a disaster, and nothing at all has changed now he is the leader of the official opposition. It is hard to believe that last Thursday Conservative after Conservative stood in their place and voted against housing. It is absolutely terrible. Can members imagine? There was a vote for tens of thousands of purpose-built apartments, and the Conservative Party said no, unanimously, among those who chose to take the time to come to vote.

I say shame on the leader of the Conservative Party because that is not what a leader is all about. A leader should be inspirational in ensuring that we provide the type of supports that are necessary. That means that the leader of the official opposition is not only reckless, but also does not have a policy that is worth a cent, quite frankly.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

[Translation]

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister is not worth the cost of housing, which has doubled since he promised to make it affordable more than eight years ago. We are now learning that rents have risen by 14% in Quebec City and Montreal, all as a result of inflationary spending that has bloated government bureaucracy.

When will the Prime Minister follow my common-sense plan to eliminate taxes and cut red tape in order to build affordable houses and apartments?

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of Montreal, it is nice to see the Leader of the Opposition show up for work today. I guess there was not a fundraiser that he could attend.

However, if we want to talk about last week, what Canadians saw on display was the Leader of the Opposition bringing right-wing Republican tactics to try and shut down the government.

Canadians do not want the kind of chaos they see in Washington. They want responsible leadership in Canada, and that is not what we witnessed from the Leader of the Opposition last week.

On this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for Canadians and stand up to bullies.

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Bloc Québécois, along with their carbon tax, are not worth the cost for Quebeckers. Reports now indicate that the average family will have to spend an extra \$700 on food next year. That is the result of the most staggering increase in food prices in 40 years. That is what we get with these taxes that the Bloc Québécois wants to drastically increase.

Will the Prime Minister follow my common-sense plan to eliminate inflationary taxes and deficits so Quebeckers and Canadians can eat?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday and Friday, the Conservative leader ordered his members to vote against security measures for Ukraine, to vote against funding for emergency shelters for women and girls, and to vote against funding for thalidomide survivor support programs.

Does going after vulnerable people make him feel stronger? Is that courage? Will he admit that his irresponsible choices went much too far?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, we were proud to vote against more inflationary bureaucratic spending that does nothing for working-class Canadians. If more government spending were to solve the problems, then we would not have two million people lined up at food banks and nine out of 10 young people unable to afford a home.

Now the Liberals want to quadruple the carbon tax just as we learn that Canadians will be forced to spend another \$700 to feed themselves. Will they follow our common-sense plan to axe the tax?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Conservatives voted against Operation Unifier, which is about direct military support for Ukraine. They also voted against our free trade agreement with Ukraine. When we look at the extreme right south of the border parroting Putin's lines, we used to think that could never happen in Canada, but it is happening here.

On this side of the House, we are proud to say, "*Slava Ukraini*". Canada stands with Ukraine.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they spread fear and falsehoods about matters in other countries to distract people from the absolute misery they have caused here at home. We understand why they do not want to talk about how Canadians are living because folks cannot afford to feed themselves. They are lining up at food banks while there is the worst food price inflation in 40 years, yet the Prime Minister wants to quadruple the carbon tax with the help of his NDP junior coalition partners.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his plan to quadruple the tax so Canadians can afford to eat, heat and house themselves?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the opposition leader run from the uncomfortable questions that are being put to him on the floor of the House of Commons.

Let us look at some of the voting record that the Conservatives demonstrated last week when it comes to saving people money on reducing the cost of housing. The member has made clear that his personal position is that the government has no business investing in housing, but individual members of Parliament had the opportunity to stand up and be counted when there was a vote on the floor of the House of Commons. They said no to investments in affordable housing. They said no to thousands of apartments. They said no to housing for indigenous communities and to emergency shelters for women and girls. They also said no to funding for homeless veterans. They should be ashamed.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we said no to doubling housing costs. The Liberals doubled housing costs. That is the reality. All the slogans the member wants to spit out are not worth a hill of beans when all they have done is double housing costs.

It is just like when they said the carbon tax would help the environment. Now we know Canada has fallen four places, to 62nd out of 67 countries in the world, after they tried to impose this carbon tax.

Instead of quadrupling a tax that has failed, why will they not axe the tax and invest in technology?

• (1425)

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are proud to stand up for Canadians.

Last week, what the Conservatives did is that they voted consistently against measures that not only make life more affordable for Canadians, but help them in their time of need.

On the 988 line, which was just launched with regard to suicide prevention, what did the Conservatives do? They voted against it. When it came to supporting victims of gender-based violence, what did the Conservatives do? They voted against it. The list goes on.

That is irresponsible. That is reckless. Quite frankly, these are right-wing extreme politics from the United States that we do not want here in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government is unbelievable. Every time we tell ourselves that its incompetence could not get worse, we get treated to a “just watch me” moment that proves us wrong.

Up until last Friday, the Government of Quebec thought it was negotiating a dental care agreement with Ottawa. It is over; there is no agreement. Ottawa is trespassing in an area under Quebec's jurisdiction and stirring up another quarrel instead of reaching an agreement that would benefit everyone. At some point, maybe it would like to start working for the people?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not about jurisdiction; it is about health.

Today, dental care will be available across the country for everyone. It is not simply a question of justice, but prevention and health as well. Today, we have significantly improved our health care system, and I am so very proud of that. We can work with all the provinces and all the territories to make sure the system will work.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we already have a dental care system in Quebec. The government could simply have sent over the money and we would have improved our system, but apparently that is too complicated.

Quebec has a public system, the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec, or RAMQ, which can be enhanced through an agreement

with Ottawa. That is what everyone wants, but no, Ottawa wants to force Sun Life, a private company, into our public system. We thought that Ottawa wanted an agreement to respect provincial jurisdictions, but no, it does not give a damn. What Ottawa wants is good news just in time for the holidays. Why impose a system that is incompatible with Quebec's?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do not want to replace provincial and territorial systems. Our goal is to make sure that everyone in Canada who does not have dental insurance can have access to dental care. That is our goal. It has nothing to do with jurisdictions; it is about justice, health and dignity for everyone across the country.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thanks to New Democrats, nine million Canadians will have access to the dental care they deserve. Seniors, children, people with disabilities will soon be able to go to the dentist without worrying about the cost. Because of the NDP, families will save thousands of dollars during an affordability crisis. This is the biggest expansion of public health care in half a century.

Shamefully, last week, the Conservatives again voted no to dental care and to putting money back into people's pockets.

Can the minister explain the impact of the NDP dental plan on Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a time of great global difficulty, in a time when people all over the world are finding things hard, there are those who stand up, provide solutions and talk about how we make things better. I want to recognize the NDP for stepping forward and talking about solutions and talking about answers, when we saw Conservatives voting against dental care, voting against support for seniors, voting against support for persons with disability, voting against our children who need dental support. Shame on them.

Congratulations to any party that stands up for ideas and getting things done in this country.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more and more people are struggling to pay their bills and cannot afford a dentist. The Liberals and the Conservatives teamed up twice to vote against a dental care program.

Thanks to the NDP, seniors, children and people with disabilities will have access to this essential care. The Conservative leader, who has had dental coverage paid for by taxpayers for 20 years, wants to cut this program. It seems that what is good for the goose is not good for the gander. However, the NDP is getting people the help they need.

Oral Questions

Why did it take the Liberal government so long to fulfill its commitments on dental care?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a huge leap forward in providing dental care to everyone across the country.

I really appreciate the NDP's work. I also like the notion that all parties in the House need to work together to find solutions in these difficult times across the country, not just point out problems and criticize everything.

This is a historic day for our health care system.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is causing division and anger in unprecedented ways, with a backlash we may never have seen in this country before: 133 first nations suing the Prime Minister over the carbon tax, several provinces taking the Prime Minister to court to try to stop the tax, one province refusing to collect the tax altogether, and now the Premier of the Northwest Territories asking for a full exemption, saying, “the prices are just getting higher and higher here.”

After eight years, it is clear the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Will he put his ego aside and axe the tax?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, when the Conservatives had the chance to stand up for first nations people, they voted against the measures indigenous communities need every single day to deliver things like clean water, to deliver things like education and to make sure infrastructure is kept running and maintained. When they had a chance to stand up with first nations, what did they do? They voted against them.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Liberals have a chance to provide relief to all Canadians and first nations, they say, “We'll see you in court.” They have succeeded, though, in uniting Canadians around one thing: their hatred for the carbon tax.

As hard-working Canadians across the country visit food banks for the first time or turn their thermostats down, northerners are really facing the sting of the carbon tax. The Premier of the Northwest Territories went on to say, “I mean, ideally, a complete exemption for the territory is what we would hope for because, like I said before, the costs are already high”.

Why will the Prime Minister not have some mercy on Canadians and axe the tax?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the hon. member stop misleading Canadians. Research coming out of the University of Calgary last week shows that the Conservatives' plan to make pollution free again will only benefit those earning over \$250,000 a year and hurt almost everybody else.

The Conservative leader says that he cares about affordability, but last week, in the middle of the night, they voted to cut affordable housing construction, cut the school food program, cut dental care for the most vulnerable and cut affordable child care. Shame, shame, shame.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in one of his first comments as Premier of the Northwest Territories, R.J. Simpson simply said yesterday that a carbon tax “doesn't work” for Northwest Territories. He said, “a complete exemption for the territory is what we would hope for because, like I said before, the costs are already high—higher costs are not the solution up here.”

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing this Christmas, fire the environment minister and axe the carbon tax?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, wildfires have ravaged our country. In the Northwest Territories, towns were almost burned down. We had to evacuate the capital city of the Northwest Territories. What did the Conservatives do? They voted against the measures that fight against climate change, and they voted against the measures to support Canadians in their time of need as well.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer throws the current Premier of the Northwest Territories completely under the bus. The Prime Minister unfairly gives a tax exemption to certain Canadians and not others. His environment minister has doubled down recently and said he is going to give that exemption to some, but not others. Liberal hot air will not keep Northwest Territories residents warm this Christmas.

Will the minister come to the Northwest Territories, sit across from families in Northwest Territories and tell them why the government will not exempt them from the carbon tax?

• (1435)

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change is having a devastating effect on northern communities, with the north warming at three times the rate of the south. We have seen some of the most devastating effects of climate change this last summer, with horrible wildfires all over Northwest Territories. Our government is focused on making ends meet for northerners, while at the same time battling climate change and making sure that northerners have what they need to live a good life.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the Bloc-Liberal coalition is not worth the cost. The Premier of the Northwest Territories wants to know why the provinces that voted for the Liberal Party got a tax break while the Northwest Territories are having to pay the tax when the prices there, and I quote the premier, are just getting higher and higher. With rising prices, Canadian families will have to choose between heating and eating at Christmas.

When will the Prime Minister scrap his plan to drastically increase the carbon tax for farmers and families?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I were a Conservative member from Quebec, I would be embarrassed this morning. I would choose my words carefully. They voted against funding for the Mégantic bypass, against assistance for Quebec's dairy, egg and poultry producers, against funding for the Plains of Abraham and against assistance for the Magdalen Islands following the hurricane. They even insulted the people of the Magdalen Islands.

If I were a Conservative, I would be darned embarrassed.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Christmas will be here in a few days. Here is what I would be very embarrassed about if I were a member of this Liberal cabinet, or a Liberal. I would be embarrassed to know that one child's Christmas wish list asked for a gift card so that he could enjoy a good Christmas meal. That is embarrassing.

When will the Liberals finally understand that their plan is broken and that their insistence on quadrupling the carbon tax will only make things worse for all Canadians and Quebecers?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now we have heard everything. The Conservatives are trying every trick in the book to avoid talking about what they did last week. It is disgraceful. Canadians feel betrayed that the Conservatives voted against measures, against food banks, against offering shelter and services to women and against Ukraine.

Who gives them their instructions? Is their leader being influenced by Donald Trump in the United States?

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, sometimes in politics there are simple files, so my question will be rather simple.

The federal government owes \$460 million to Quebec for taking in asylum seekers, something that falls strictly under federal jurisdiction. Last Friday, the Minister of Immigration met with his counterpart from Quebec.

My question is simple: Did he reimburse Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I met with my counterpart, Minister Fréchette, on Friday. We had some good conversations.

It is clear that there are some things where we do not see eye to eye with Quebec. For example, we would like Quebec to make more of an effort when it comes to welcoming and reuniting Quebec families. Nevertheless, the meeting generally went well.

Now, we will see. The finance ministers are meeting and they will have good conversations on the issues that concern them. I am very optimistic about all of this. We all care about migration and reasoned approaches to immigrant settlement.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, no need for three-month round tables; a 30-second conversation should be plenty. The minister has three things to say. The first is thank you. The second is, to whom should I make out the cheque? And the third is, where do I deposit the money?

When will he reimburse Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we will continue the conversation, but Bloc Québécois members will not be the first to know.

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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers are royally fed up with the monarchy. That is why the Quebec National Assembly unanimously passed a motion last Friday to request the elimination of the position of Lieutenant Governor. Every elected member of every political party wants to replace this role with a democratic institution.

Of course, there would be no such consensus in this House. We know that some Canadian MPs think night and day about their fealty to Charles III. As for us Quebecers, our desire for democratic modernization is unanimous. Will the government listen to reason and finally eliminate the position of Lieutenant Governor of Quebec?

● (1440)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that my colleague fantasizes about the monarchy and reopening the Constitution.

On this side of the House, we prefer to tackle the challenges of our society like housing, the rising cost of living and, most importantly, Conservative cuts. They want to make cuts in areas where cutbacks would be totally unacceptable. They voted for cuts in areas that are incredibly important for Quebec and all Canadians. They should be ashamed.

Oral Questions

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight long years, more and more Canadians are realizing that the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost. We can now add the Premier of the Northwest Territories to the growing list of people asking the NDP-Liberal government to listen to their concerns and axe the carbon tax.

As the Christmas season arrives, the Prime Minister's gift of giving has been replaced by a gift of taking from families, farmers and first nations. Will the Prime Minister finally cancel his plan to quadruple the carbon tax and stop his plan to ruin Christmas?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government came to power, after 10 years of Harper and the member for Carleton, we were on track to see a 12% increase in carbon emissions by 2030.

Last week we released the update on the emissions reduction plan, and it was a dramatic turnaround. We will exceed the initial target of 30%, which we then raised to 40%. We will more than achieve the 2026 interim target, and we are on track to achieve the 40% target by 2030. I am very pleased to say that our climate plan is working. Where is the Conservative climate plan?

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is from a minister whose government spent three-and-a-half times more responding to emergencies than supporting first nations communities to prevent these emergencies.

The NDP-Liberal government refuses to listen. The newly elected AFN chief now lends her voice to the growing list of people who want to axe the carbon tax, which increases the costs of gas, groceries and home heating for all Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister finally cancel his carbon tax, so families, farmers and first nations can afford a meal on Christmas Eve?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday evening and Friday, the Conservative Party of Canada explained exactly who they are and how much they support farmers. In fact, they voted against farmers. For example, there was \$337 million for the supply management program; Conservatives voted against it. It is vitally important to the agricultural sector.

I can assure the dairy farmers, chicken farmers and egg farmers in this country that we support them and will continue to do so.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals actually wanted to support farmers, they would axe the carbon tax.

After eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, a turkey in northern Alberta costs \$82. Why would this be? Perhaps it is the carbon tax. I talked to a turkey farmer in northern Alberta, and he says he is struggling to pay the carbon tax. Regardless of how expensive the turkey is in the grocery store, he is having to pay the carbon tax; he is unable to make a living to put food on his own table.

Will the Prime Minister quit his “bah, humbug” approach this Christmas and take off the carbon tax for families, farmers and first nations, so Canadians can all enjoy a turkey for Christmas?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope that turkey farmer looked at what the Conservative Party of Canada did last Thursday and then Friday.

Conservatives continually vote against agriculture and farmers. We, on this side of the House, will make sure that we fully support agriculture. Conservatives voted against funding for on-farm climate action. On-farm climate action will help the environment.

We have supported farmers; we will continue to do so and take care of the climate in this country.

* * *

● (1445)

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, right here in Ottawa, the average rent for a one-bedroom has hit a record high of \$2,100 a month. It is close to \$3,000 in Vancouver and Toronto. It is unacceptable that the out-of-touch Liberals are delaying housing funding for another two years; people cannot afford rent now.

Then there are the Conservatives, who do not even believe in community housing and would rather give handouts to luxury condo developers. Will the Liberals stop delaying and get the money out the door now to build much-needed affordable housing?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy for additional investments in affordable housing and housing more broadly. I would remind my hon. colleague that, in fact, there are programs that exist today that are rolling dollars out the door to get more homes built. In fact, just a few weeks ago, we announced more than \$4 billion worth of loans; this is going to result in more than 12,000 new apartments being constructed. In addition, we recapitalized our affordable housing fund to the tune of \$1 billion in the fall economic statement, on top of the more than \$300 million going to co-operative housing, which will be rolling out early in the new year. I am willing to work with all members of the House, including that member, to build more homes faster.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Kouta family are Palestinian Canadians from London who are currently stranded in Gaza. Ahmed Kouta is a nurse who has spent months caring for the wounded at one of Gaza's besieged hospitals. He is a hero, but he and his three brothers are being denied the right to exit Gaza, and the minister refuses to explain why. Without a ceasefire, there are strong reasons to worry that the Kouta family may be killed within days if Canada does not act now. Mahmoud Kouta asked, "Is there hope or am I waiting for my death?" When will Canada get the Kouta family out of Gaza?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for having done so much work last week, voting for 30 hours in support of the work that we are doing together.

Meanwhile, I completely understand how dire the situation in Gaza is. It is one of the worst places in the world to live right now. The Minister of Immigration and I are working actively to find a very compassionate approach when it comes to Canadians and their families, and we will get Canadians out of Gaza. I am in close contact with my Israeli and Egyptian counterparts to make sure that the Kouta family can come back to Canada.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our federal government has always shown support for Ukraine as it defends itself against the illegal and unprovoked attack by Russia. In fact, this House, and indeed this country, has always been unanimous and steadfast in its support; however, two weeks ago, Conservatives voted against the modernized Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, and just last Friday, they voted against \$500 million in additional aid to Ukraine. Can the Minister of National Defence highlight the support that Canada has been providing to Ukraine in its fight against Russia's illegal invasion?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sadly, the member for Davenport is right. Just last week, the Conservatives voted against funding for Canada's military operations, they voted against compensation improvements for CAF members and they voted against military aid for Ukraine under Operation Unifier. Under Operation Unifier, we are doing vital work, including training nearly 40,000 Ukrainian troops and supplying Ukrainian forces with the munitions and equipment they need.

We will stand up for our troops. We will stand with our allies and partners. We will stand up for Ukraine, even if the Conservatives cut and run. Hansard remembers.

Slava Ukraini.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the current NDP-Liberal government, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost of Christmas dinner. His carbon tax is driving up costs so high that Canadian households are struggling as we head into the holiday season. What is worse is that he is planning to quadruple this tax on groceries, gas and home heating. Instead, why does the Prime Minister not axe his carbon tax so that Canadians can afford Christmas dinner?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a shocking turn of events, just last week, the Conservative Party held hostage the progress and investments that we continue to make in Canadians. When given the chance to support increasing the number of child care spaces in rural and underserved communities, what did the Conservatives do? They voted against.

What does this mean? This means not supporting new and much-needed child care spaces in rural and underserved communities. The Conservatives are just not worth the risk.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals simply do not understand is that their plan is just not working. It is not just Conservatives saying it. The Chiefs of Ontario, representing 133 first nations, nearly a third of which are located in the Kenora district, are taking the government to court. They argue that the carbon tax leaves them worse off and breaches the principles of reconciliation. Therefore, why does the Prime Minister not finally show some common sense and axe his tax on farmers, families and first nations for good?

• (1450)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are always trying to cancel climate action, but last week the Grinch, or the leader of the Conservative Party, tried to cancel Christmas as well. Instead, he cancelled—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. As the hon. parliamentary secretary and all members know, we are not supposed to call members of Parliament mock names.

I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to rephrase the question, please.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are always trying to cancel climate action, but last week, the leader of the Conservatives tried to cancel Christmas too. Instead, he just cancelled his credibility.

Last week, the Conservatives voted against the GST being taken off psychotherapy and counselling. Last week, the Conservatives voted against seniors getting their teeth fixed. When will he admit that his reckless plan is putting Canadians at risk?

Oral Questions

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 133 chiefs from across Ontario are calling out the government's unjust carbon tax as driving up the cost of everything for first nations communities. In what is typically a festive time for many, indigenous families are wondering how they are going to pay the cost of food. The Prime Minister's quadrupling of the carbon tax is driving up the cost on farmers and truckers, which raises the cost of food.

Will the Prime Minister finally cancel his plan to quadruple the carbon tax on families, first nations and farmers forever?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I have heard a lot about rising costs. I just want to make sure Canadians watching appreciate that, when parliamentarians vote for 30 hours, and it costs about \$70,000 an hour to keep this place running, it is costing Canadian taxpayers about \$2 million. That is the first point.

Second, with respect to the point that was just made by the member opposite, if Conservatives were so concerned about the price of food, I would have thought they might have voted in favour of a school food program to keep food prices down for young Canadians in this country. Alas, they voted against it.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight long years of the Liberal-NDP government, quality of life has not improved for indigenous peoples. Now, 133 first nations in Ontario are taking the government to court over the carbon tax, stating that the climate cannot be helped at the expense of communities. The Prime Minister is making life harder for everyone by raising the cost of food through his carbon tax, so Conservatives will delay the Prime Minister's vacation until he removes it.

Will the Prime Minister finally cancel his carbon tax, so indigenous families can share a meal with friends and family on Christmas?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives had wanted to make life easier for first nations people, they would not have voted against so many measures that first nations leaders need and are essential to running good communities, things like education, emergency management, water infrastructure and the building of homes.

These are the kinds of things that Conservatives voted against last week. They have never been there for indigenous people, and they continue to vote against them.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, COP will come to a close tomorrow, ending in failure, with a final declaration that obfuscates the importance of eliminating fossil fuels.

Canada blames the OPEC countries. However, the Liberals just announced a plan to cap greenhouse gas emissions for oil companies, but that does not apply until 2030. There is nothing until 2030,

and if we have not cut emissions by 60% by then, global warming will have shattered the Paris Agreement targets.

Do the Liberals realize that their record at COP is no better than that of the oil monarchies?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is at COP28 to show that we are committed to advancing the low-carbon economy.

We are working on a plan to cap emissions from the oil and gas sector and ensure that this sector makes a significant contribution to meeting Canada's climate targets.

• (1455)

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the COP review, and the year-end review as well.

When Quebeckers look back on their year, they will think about the forest fires that turned Quebec's skies into a science-fiction set. They will think of the torrential rains that cancelled vacations, ruined harvests and caused rivers to burst their banks.

Quebeckers will not be thinking about COP, but they will be thinking seriously about climate change. At the end of the day, that is how the success or failure of governments is measured at COPs.

Do the Liberals realize that they are once again ending the year on a failure?

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to, once again, say that Canada was the first nation ever to put a cap on oil and gas emissions at COP28.

That comes in the exact same week as Canada was the first country ever to suggest that we were going to reduce our methane oil and gas emissions by 75%. That is leadership in climate action.

I welcome the questions from the Bloc and the NDP about how we fight climate change, because the questions from the Conservatives are so consistently about whether or not we fight climate change.

The answer is yes. We rise to the challenge and we are climate action leaders here in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about Canada's leadership in the global environmental arena.

As we all know, COP28 is happening right now. I am participating virtually, which means that I regularly attend the discussions, but with zero emissions and zero cost. Let us not forget that last year, at COP27, a document was published on the effectiveness of countries in terms of climate change. Canada ranked 58th.

Would the minister please stand up and tell us where Canada stands one year later?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has done a tremendous job. He has already given very good answers to the many questions posed by the opposition.

However, there is one thing that I do not understand. The last battle on the Plains of Abraham took place in 1759, but during the votes last week, we saw that the Conservatives want to wage another battle on those plains. They voted against renovating infrastructure at the Plains of Abraham and making it safer. We know that there are very few Conservatives in the Magdalen Islands and that they are not welcome there.

Will the Conservatives be a little embarrassed to visit the Plains of Abraham in the coming weeks?

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the minister would be embarrassed, because Canada dropped from 58th place to 62nd in just one year. That is the result after one year under this Liberal government. What happened after eight years? The Liberals have spent the past eight years lecturing everyone and setting high targets that they are never able to meet. Canada has now fallen to 62nd place.

[English]

By the way, who was saying, in 2015, that “Canada is back”? The Prime Minister. Today, Canada is way, way back. That is the reality of their eight years in this cabinet.

[Translation]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take no lessons from the Conservatives.

Last week, they voted against the aerospace industry. They voted against tourism businesses. They voted against the Plains of Abraham. Imagine that, the Plains of Abraham. The member for Louis-Saint-Laurent should be ashamed to have voted against the Plains of Abraham.

Will he use his influence to bring his colleagues to their senses? On this side of the House, we will fight for Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal-NDP government, even a report from COP28 is showing that this Prime Minister is not worth the cost. The climate change performance index ranked Canada 62nd out of 67 countries on climate change performance, despite the fact that Canada has one of the highest carbon taxes in the world.

Will the Prime Minister finally admit that he does not have an environment plan and that he has a tax plan?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only is the Conservative Party opposed to addressing affordability in this country and not only is it opposed to fighting climate change, it has a hard time keeping its statements straight.

In 2008, the Conservative Party platform stated, “We will work...to...implement a North America-wide cap and trade system for greenhouse gases.”

The 2021 platform, on which all of these members were elected, stated, “We recognize that the most efficient way to reduce our emissions is to use pricing mechanisms.”

More recently, the member for Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, who asked a question here about carbon pricing, sat in Premier Campbell’s caucus and voted in—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Guelph.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, housing is too expensive everywhere. To solve the housing crisis, we need to get more homes built faster. One simply cannot get more homes built by cutting housing funding.

My question is for the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities.

How will the housing measures included in the supplementary estimates, which the Conservative leader just voted to cut, help solve the housing crisis?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know from the course of our history that we have to make investments if we are going to solve the national housing crisis, but with the Conservative position to cut everything, Canadians are right to ask what it is they are going to cut. Thankfully, they put on a full display of a series of measures that they want to get rid of. This includes investments that were going to build thousands of affordable homes for Canadians. This includes investments that are going to build apartments at reasonable prices. This includes investments in indigenous housing initiatives, investments in transitional housing for women and children, and investments in homelessness supports for veterans.

If Conservatives cannot stand along with the vulnerable, they will stand with no one but themselves.

*Oral Questions***INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY**

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Ethics Commissioner has launched an investigation into a second Liberal-appointed member at their billion-dollar green slush fund. Two Liberal appointees together have funnelled more than \$600,000 to their own companies. It is clear the Prime Minister is not worth the cost to struggling Canadians. Though the NDP-Liberal government tried to silence the whistle-blower, the whistle-blower will be testifying at committee tonight.

Can the Prime Minister cut the drama so that we do not have to wait for this evening, and tell Canadians how many other Liberal insiders got rich?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us cut the drama. These Conservatives are so against climate change that they want to cut one of the institutions that funds clean technology in this country.

The moment we learned about the allegation, we launched an investigation. We took remedial action. The chair of the board has resigned. The CEO has resigned. We are going to get to the bottom of this, restore confidence, have governance and continue to fund clean tech in this country.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these Liberals and that minister were satisfied with their cover-up report and wanted the board chair and their CEO to implement the recommendations at this corrupt organization, but now with the Auditor General investigating and the Ethics Commissioner investigating two Liberal appointees, the board chair and the CEO have resigned in disgrace. There is \$1 billion on the line and we know that up to \$150 million has been embezzled. Canadians cannot afford the Prime Minister after eight years of him and his NDP-Liberal government.

It is very easy. We want to know who got rich.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians, those watching at home, cannot stand anymore is the fact that these Conservatives are making up stories and allegations. They saw last week what they are able to do. Let me get the facts straight. The moment we learned about the allegation we took action and, by the way, the chair that the member referred to served under a Conservative government.

Let us not focus on people. Let us focus on restoring governance and funding clean tech in this country. We will get to the bottom of this and restore confidence in this institution.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal government, friends of the Prime Minister use the Canada green fund to treat themselves. The head of the \$1-billion green fund is under investigation for approving \$400,000 in funding to a business he is the owner of.

When and how will the government recoup the taxpayer dollars given by the green fund to friends of the Prime Minister and stop handing out gifts paid for by Canadians?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his dramatic performance. I am sure he will get an important part.

In terms of facts, I think that Canadians will stick to what we are saying. As I said, the moment we learned about the allegations, we launched an investigation. The chair of the board and the CEO of the institution have resigned. We are going to get to the bottom of this and restore governance, but we are also going to ensure that we fund businesses in Canada that will introduce technologies to fight climate change. That is the responsible thing to do.

* * *

● (1505)

[*English*]

DENTAL CARE

Hon. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has made it clear that dental care coverage is a priority, but in this House last week the Conservatives were the only party to vote against funding for the Canada dental care plan. Instead, the Conservatives want Canadians to pay for their care out of pocket.

Today, the Minister of Health announced the next steps of our work to provide a historic dental care program in this country. Can he tell Canadians what this means for them?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday and Friday, we got to see what the Conservatives had not been willing to show, which is that in a time of global difficulty when people all over the world are suffering, their solution here in Canada is to cut from the services and supports that Canadians desperately need.

What does that mean in dental care? It means for seniors I have been talking to for decades who have not been able to get their dentures, they voted against them getting their dentures and having that dignity. They voted against preventative health care that makes sure people do not get cardiovascular disease or diabetes or that they have to go to an emergency room because they put off that critical care.

We are delivering dental care for this country along with the NDP.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the delay-and-disappoint Liberals are letting veterans and their families down yet again. This time it is because they failed to eliminate the “marriage over 60” clause that puts veterans' spouses, mostly elderly women, into poverty. When I asked the Minister of National Defence what has happened with the \$150 million the Liberals promised for a veterans survivors fund, after four years, he could not give me an answer.

Our veterans and their families deserve better, and so I am asking the minister again: Are any of the veterans' families receiving the promised survivors benefit?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her continued advocacy on this matter.

When a veteran serves in the military, their family serves with them. Our government is extremely sensitive to the situation of widowed spouses of veterans who married after the age of 60. In budget 2019, we announced an amount of money to make sure we put in place a program, and I am looking forward to making sure that the program rolls out in the very near future.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, following the disability community's disappointment that not a cent was set aside for the Canada disability benefit in the fall economic statement, stakeholders are now sharing that the Department of Finance is considering determining eligibility through the incredibly burdensome application for the disability tax credit. This flies in the face of an amendment I proposed, and was supported by all colleagues, requiring that the benefit be barrier-free.

Will the minister confirm that they will find a barrier-free application process as prescribed by law?

Hon. Kamal Khara (Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his active participation in voting for investments, like the administration of the Canada disability benefit, while the Conservative members voted against it last week.

As I mentioned in the committee earlier today, getting the CDB out as quickly as possible and getting it right is our top priority. We are doing it by extensively consulting with the disability community in the true spirit of “nothing without us”. In fact, online, public, fully accessible consultations are open, and I hope that all members and all Canadians with disabilities will participate.

[Translation]

The Speaker: That is all the time we have for question period.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent on a point of order.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, earlier, I referred to a document that was tabled at COP28 entitled “Climate Change Performance Index”—

Some hon. members: No.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[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 32 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour today to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled “Convention Establishing the Square Kilometre Array Observatory”, done at Rome on March 12, 2019, and “Agreement between Canada and the Square Kilometre Array Observatory concerning the Accession of Canada to the Convention Establishing the Square Kilometre Array Observatory” done at Ottawa on October 13, 2023, and at Lower Withington, United Kingdom, on October 30, 2023.

Second, I table “Agreement on Air Transport between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Dominican Republic”, done at Santo Domingo on February 2, 2023.

Third, I table “Exchange of Letters constituting an agreement amending the Agreement for Co-operation Concerning Civil Uses of Atomic Energy between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America, done at Washington on 15 June 1955, as amended”, done at Washington on June 26, 2023, and at Ottawa on July 7, 2023.

* * *

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN WATER ACT

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-61, An Act respecting water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nation lands.

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

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege and the honour to present, in both official languages, two reports of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

While I have the floor, let me say that I am very proud that we are a very functional committee here on the Hill and are getting lots of good work done.

I present the 15th report, entitled “Protecting Against Animal Biosecurity Risks: The State of Canada’s Preparedness”, and the 16th report, entitled “Striking a Balance: Electronic Logging Device Requirements Impacting Animal Transportation”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these two reports. I have copies of the document, which I am happy to give. I thank all the folks who participated in these two studies, and I thank my hon. colleagues for their good work.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 21st report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, entitled “Current Human Rights Situation in Iran”. It is in reference to an icon of the human rights movement in Iran, Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh.

In addition, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, entitled “The Rights and Freedoms of Women and Girls Globally, and in Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia”.

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

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, in relation to Bill C-50, An Act respecting accountability, transparency and engagement to support the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero economy.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report it back to the House with amendments.

• (1515)

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, presented to the House on Monday, June 5, be concurred in.

Today, I am seeking the agreement of the House on the 12th report of the justice committee, a report which condemns the violence of the Taliban regime, affirms that it is not the legitimate government of Afghanistan and expresses the belief that the Taliban must remain a listed terrorist organization. This matter is particularly timely, for reasons that I will explain shortly.

As 2023 draws to a close, the world is seeing a proliferation of violent conflicts that merit our closer scrutiny. I will focus my remarks today mainly on Afghanistan, of course, but I do think the wider context is important to set out first.

The further invasion of Ukraine by Russia continues. We now see clear evidence that genocide and other war crimes have been perpetrated by the invading armies, at the direction and with the full support of the Putin regime. This regime practises the large-scale abduction of Ukrainian children, allows its soldiers to use sexual violence as a weapon of war and indiscriminately targets civilians for the purpose of inflicting maximal terror. For the residual “end of history” crowd, this war should have broken any remaining illusions about what kind of a world we are still living in.

This fall, the terrorist organization Hamas launched a horrific and unprecedented attack on Israel. Like the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this attack by Hamas has included child stealing, sexual violence and the intentional targeting and terrorizing of civilians. Hamas did not act in isolation; it has received constant support from the terrorist IRGC, the Iranian regime’s weapon of terror. The Iranian regime has long been recognized as a state sponsor of terror through its support of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Syrian regime, Houthi rebels in Yemen, extremist militias in Iraq and others. The regime uses proxies in an attempt to shelter itself from direct retaliation, but we should be under no illusions about its responsibility.

When it comes to war and terrorism, at least in the Middle East, all roads lead back to Tehran, and this is a key reason Conservatives have long called for the listing of the IRGC as a terrorist organization, particularly since the House of Commons adopted my motion calling for that listing more than five years ago. The Iranian regime is committing grotesque atrocities in its attacks against Israelis and others that parallel the atrocities that the Russian regime is responsible for. These two regimes have been steadily increasing their co-operation, sharing technology and offering each other various other forms of strategic support.

Meanwhile, the people of Burma are fighting for their freedom. Following a military coup, the dissident democracy movement has established effective dissident institutions and strengthened itself through growing ethnic reconciliation efforts that include the long-persecuted Rohingya people. Burma’s democratic forces are facing the illegitimate coup leaders in the Tatmadaw that occupies their capital, and the Tatmadaw is increasingly escalating its atrocities, also targeting women, children and civilians in general. The Tatmadaw, the military that claims but does not effectively control the territory or exercise legitimate sovereignty over Burma, is also collaborating with the Putin regime, sharing weapons and technology, and allowing it to avoid western sanctions.

Routine Proceedings

I met recently with leaders from various communities in Central and South America to talk about human rights issues here in our hemisphere, and it was a strikingly familiar message: persistent abuse of human rights by authoritarian regimes, this time with roads leading back to Havana, including the targeting of civilians and escalating co-operation between the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes, on the one hand, and the governments of Russian and Iran, on the other. One demonstration of this growing association is that Cuba is actually sending soldiers to fight for Russia during its invasion of Ukraine. It is, I think, not nearly widely known enough that Cuba is effectively participating in sending its own soldiers into Russia's genocidal invasion. The Government of Venezuela is now threatening its neighbour Guyana, holding a sham referendum recently to justify potential aggression. The Maduro regime is further stepping up its pressure on its neighbour after the discovery of additional oil reserves in Guyanese territory.

There are Russia, Iran, Burma, Cuba, Venezuela, and to this list we could add others, such as North Korea, Eritrea and, most critically, the Government of the PRC. The Communist regime in Beijing controls the world's most populous nation and second-largest economy, and this regime is working overtime to overturn the concept of a democratic rules-based order and replace it with a dynamic in which oppressed domestic populations and vulnerable neighbours can be threatened and dominated at will by regimes whose only necessary justification is power.

The free and democratic nations that uphold doctrines of universal human rights rooted in universal human dignity must struggle, and struggle successfully, against this emerging axis of revisionist imperialist authoritarian powers. We must struggle for the rule of law and for the greater recognition of universal human rights against these powers and principalities for whom the exercise of raw power requires no moral justification. This is the new cold war. The string of events that we see around the world are not random, unrelated occurrences. They are not simply a collection of bad coincidences. They are, rather, the result of strategic co-operation among nations that want a different future for the world than the free and democratic future that we desire for our children and grandchildren.

● (1520)

Struggling successfully in this new cold war requires us to invest in our military, to build up our munitions production capacity, to support people who are fighting for their own freedom around the world, to decisively isolate terrorist organizations, to stand with our allies and to strategically engage the swing states of the 21st-century global conflict through strengthening trade and other forms of partnership with the global south. We must do these things, and we must do them persistently over time. Lifting the new iron curtain will require a renewed iron will.

In these challenging times, I believe we can prevail, but I do not believe we will prevail necessarily. We will prevail if and only if we make the smart decisions that are required to defend our security interests and our way of life. Fancy socks, photo ops and cuts to our military are not going to help us in the midst of this new cold war. Serious times require serious leaders. Our country needs true statesmanship. It needs a will to confront hard truths in the pursuit of a more just, human and democratic victory.

Afghanistan is one more front in this global struggle. In the fall of 2021, a little over two years ago and before many other aspects of this escalating cold war had taken place, Afghanistan was abandoned by the west and then overrun by the Taliban, an internationally recognized terrorist group. The western pullout from Afghanistan was not the result of battlefield defeats. Rather, it was the result of that pernicious virus in which foreign policy debates in the democratic world seem uniquely susceptible: fatigue. Many of us are too optimistic in wishing to believe that our struggles for freedom and justice will be quick and easy. We react to initial needs with eagerness, but our interest tapers off as the events in question are no longer in the news. Eventually, people start to ask themselves, "Why is that still going on? Is that thing over there still happening?" Fatigue in foreign policy explains the odd habit among free nations of sometimes abandoning a task when it is almost complete. While it may be psychologically understandable, this is strategically inexplicable, allowing the reversal of critical gains at the point at which most of the work has, in fact, already been done.

In Afghanistan, by the time of the pullout, the Afghan army was able to fight back against the Taliban with relatively limited western air support. Far from constituting a forever war, limited backup support at a relatively low cost was sustaining the Afghan army and the Afghan government. In a sense, the task was almost complete. The Afghans were fighting for their own future in circumstances that required some, but limited, western support. Arbitrarily pulling these last elements of western support created a hole in the dam, and the Taliban flooded in.

Free peoples must not allow themselves to be overcome by fatigue when steadfastness and strategic patience can instead finish the job. If we needed to learn that lesson again, I hope we apply it in today's ongoing struggles in other places. Our strategic foes in every part of the world, particularly in the Kremlin, hope that we will be overcome by fatigue and abandon our posts in more countries, opening the door to the further expansion of injustice and tyranny.

Routine Proceedings

The invocation of fatigue is particularly striking to me when used to explain the behaviours of countries or individuals not actually involved in or doing the fighting, which was the position of many countries by 2021. Even countries that were involved were committing far fewer troops than many other theatres around the world. If some felt fatigue about the length of the conflict in Afghanistan, or if we feel fatigue today because of how long the war has gone on in Ukraine, then imagine how the people of Afghanistan and Ukraine felt and feel. If they, in the midst of the intensity and violence of their struggles, are prepared to persist in their own bloody fights for their freedom, then the least we can do is have their back. If we needed to learn again about the dangers of this so-called fatigue, then I hope Afghanistan has taught us well. Afghanistan was abandoned, so fell to the complete control of a terrorist organization. This terrorist organization, though having its own particular genesis and ideological orientation, has unsurprisingly fallen quickly into partnership with the world's authoritarian block.

The motion before us is timely because the Taliban's ambassador has just been accepted and received in Beijing, as both sides cultivate ties with each other based on shared antipathy toward the west, shared disdain for international human rights norms and a narrow calculation of immediate interests. Formally speaking, it does not make sense that an ostensibly Muslim organization would aggressively court a regime currently committing genocide and seeking to replace in their homeland the Muslim Uyghur people, but the new cold war reality is one in which authoritarian powers notionally conflicting ideologies co-operate against the west, not for ideology but for power.

The temporary loss of Afghanistan to this authoritarian block has been a significant setback, but on this side of the House, we believe the west must remain resolute in its support for the Afghan people and its recognition that they desire and deserve that their freedom and democracy be restored. If we accept Taliban control of Afghanistan, if we accede to this violent takeover, then we would be leaving the Afghan people to a fate we would never contemplate for ourselves. The Afghan people around the world are now mobilizing to challenge the Taliban in all domains. Democratic nations should be prepared to pursue strengthened dialogue and collaboration with democratic opposition and resistance groups, working to keep the dream alive.

Authoritarian regimes are often weaker than they appear. The nature of repressive regimes is that evident elements of weakness cannot be discussed directly by those who can see them most clearly, which is why predicting the moment of their fall is always very difficult.

• (1525)

Without popular legitimacy, these regimes are brittle and can disintegrate unexpectedly. Bringing about that disintegration requires supportive engagement with democratic opposition groups and unrelenting pressure on the regime.

At this time, the House must consider what we can meaningfully do to promote democratization in a place like Afghanistan. It seems that often in these sorts of situations, we perceive a binary choice that is in fact a false choice. In the aftermath of 9/11, democracy promotion was discussed particularly in terms of western military

action. The sense was that if the west wanted to promote democracy, that involved directly pushing the advancement of democracy through military action. Of course, that approach was very costly.

Critics of this approach have posited as the primary alternative a complete "live and let live" approach, leaving in place anti-democratic regimes, tolerating them, engaging with them, and naively seeking the kind of close relations that make us vulnerable to strategic trade disruption and foreign interference.

Importantly, there are many other alternatives for dealing with regimes we do not like, besides the extremes of military intervention or complete tolerance. We can, instead, pursue policies of non-interventionist intolerance. That is, we can firmly oppose anti-democratic regimes at the diplomatic level, especially in international forums. We can use terrorist listing, sanctions and other tools to punish bad actors, and we can structure our trade relations to avoid situations of strategic vulnerability for us while seeking to deprive our adversaries of the material capacity to oppose us. We can also support opposition and civil society groups. This combination creates many points of pressure on anti-democratic regimes, pressure that makes them less sustainable over time.

The shock and awe of direct external military intervention produces quick, though not always durable, results. Sustained pressure, non-interventionist intolerance, takes time. It seeks to tip the scales as much as we can toward freedom and democracy, acknowledging that we in the west do not have limitless capacity to change the world, but we do have some capacity to change the world. This strategy seeks to use the capacity that we have in ways that are prudent and effective.

Strategic and financial pressure does not usually have a predictable timeline associated with it, but it produces results when the combination of external and internal pressure becomes too much for the regime to hold. This strategy has a good track record. It is, after all, what won us the last Cold War, when the free democratic world finally developed the necessary clarity and resolve to squeeze the Soviet empire and bring about its disintegration. Such success was possible, though it was never inevitable. It required investment, discipline and confidence over time. The same will be required to achieve victory in this cold war.

During the French Revolution, the great Admiral Horatio Nelson said, of England's relations with the revolutionary and violent French Republic, "although we might one day hope to be at peace with France, we must ever be at war with French principles." He meant that, of course, in the context of the revolution.

Routine Proceedings

A similar situation should prevail today as it relates to the Taliban. Although we are not at war with the Taliban, we are at war with Taliban principles. We oppose the things they stand for and we oppose normalization. In a world that is more interconnected than ever, normalization of relations with extremist terrorist groups obviously makes us more vulnerable. Normalization undermines the efforts of opposition groups and effectively provides terrorist organizations with more resources that they can use against us and against their own people.

A policy of sustained pressure on the Taliban and on other bad actors aligns with the aspirations of the Afghan people and of all people everywhere. The greatest strategic advantage that free democracies have is that they are offering a system that the people living in countries controlled by our strategic adversaries actually want. Sustained pressure is not going to impose change from outside. It will rather create the conditions that allow the Afghan people to eventually seize control of their own destiny once again.

In the meantime, we must also maintain and strengthen engagement with the Afghan people in other ways, including through looking for innovative tools to provide information and education to people living inside Afghanistan who are barred from attending school. I know all members are horrified by the policies of gender apartheid that are in place in Afghanistan and that prevent girls from going to school. We need to be thinking more creatively about unconventional tools for delivering education and other forms of information to people living in repressive contexts. There are many ways to deliver education outside of a traditional classroom context, ways that are harder for the Taliban or other repressive authorities to interrupt. This is how we must stand with and continue to support the Afghan people.

It is important to add that we are having this debate in a context where the government has been extremely weak on the listing of terrorist organizations in general. Up until now, the Liberal position has remained to support the continuing listing of the Taliban as a terrorist organization, which is good, but Liberals have refused to follow the direction of the House to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization and to list the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization.

• (1530)

These organizations, instruments of terror for the Iranian and Russian regimes respectively, belong on our terror list. The selective listing of terrorist organizations undermines the whole endeavour. All terrorist organizations should be listed as such. Listing these organizations as terrorist entities would shut down their operations in Canada. It would prevent them from operating, fundraising and recruiting here on Canadian soil.

The government has refused to shut down Iranian and Russian regime-backed terrorists by listing these entities. We will continue to push it to add these organizations to the terrorist list and shut down their operations here in Canada. I proposed Bill C-350, a bill that would list the IRGC and take additional measures to support victims of torture, terrorism and extrajudicial killing. We have tried to advance that bill, but the Liberals have twice blocked it from advancing. We will continue to fight to move it forward.

In the time I have remaining, I have one additional observation that I want to make about the current debates happening throughout North America in the context of this new cold war.

Sometimes in the face of authoritarian threats, we in the west have a strange habit of trying to identify authoritarian regimes as “right” or “left”. One dictatorship is deemed “rightist” and another is deemed “leftist”, even if the regimes in question are doing essentially the same things for essentially the same reasons. Efforts to code authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorships as representing either the left or the right, in terms of western democratic political understanding of these terms, miss the more essential point that these ideologies share the essential points in common and always stand far apart from the democratic values embraced by the west.

The coding of foreign dictatorial regimes as “left” or “right” generally reflects their own attempts at self-justification. Regimes that more frequently invoke the iconography of religion and tradition tend to be coded as “right”. Regimes that more frequently speak in terms of workers or equality tend to be coded as “left”. It is not entirely arbitrary how this coding emerges, but it still obscures the fact that these regimes do the same things to their people, work together on common anti-western projects and change the nature of their self-justification when it is convenient.

The Communist regime in Beijing is notionally a left-coded regime, because it calls itself Communist and it is increasingly reintroducing education and discussion about Marxism, but it also increasingly uses Confucian language and icons to justify its rule and promotes a kind of ethnonationalism alongside Marxism. The CCP acts through party committees at big corporations. All of these characteristics underline the problem of identifying it or trying to label it as being of the left or of the right.

Let us consider another example. The regime in Russia is frequently seen as “right” and the regime in Cuba is frequently seen as “left”. Canadian Liberals, who rightly oppose the regime in Moscow, preserve a soft spot for the regime in Havana. Our own Prime Minister shamefully described Castro as “larger than life leader who served his people”. Not only do the Russian and Cuban regimes deploy similar methods, but they are actively collaborating in the invasion of Ukraine. As mentioned, there are Cuban soldiers directly involved in the invasion of Ukraine. Calling one extreme “left” and the other extreme “right” just does not make much sense, given their common approach and collaboration. These are merely choices of the regime to justify itself in the terms it finds most convenient.

Routine Proceedings

Our position, on this side of the House, is that we should, always and everywhere, condemn these extreme statist totalitarian regimes, whether they wear the clothes of the right or the clothes of the left, whether they wear a bit of each or whether they change their clothes from time to time. On this side of the House, we stand for freedom and democracy, always and everywhere, and we stand against authoritarian and totalitarian dictatorships regardless of how they code their politics. We are uniquely consistent on this point.

To my friends in other democracies, it is important to underline that the Putin regime is an authoritarian dictatorship, strongly opposed to our values and our interests, working closely with the regimes in Havana and Tehran and backed up by the CCP. We cannot fight half the cold war. There is no sense in opposing our strategic foes in one theatre while ignoring their advances in another. These are not different fights; these are different parts of the same fight, and we must look squarely on that challenge and face it to preserve the future that we want for our children and grandchildren.

This is why Canadian Conservatives will always stand for freedom. We will stand for freedom here at home, and we will stand for freedom abroad. We will stand for freedom in Afghanistan, and we will stand for freedom in Ukraine. We stand for freedom, always and everywhere.

• (1535)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague with interest. There are a few things that came out of his speech: the use of the word “fatigue” almost 10 times; the Russian illegal war in Ukraine; the potential flashpoint between China and Taiwan; and the things that are happening with Israel and Palestine. With these sorts of flashpoints around the world, does the west have enough capacity? In fact, the member rightly mentioned that we do not have limitless capacity.

He was very clearly opposing the authoritarian regimes. The west has a relationship with various systems that are not democratic in a traditional sense. We have even started opening negotiations with Venezuela. Should we not put our interests as the focus whenever we build alliances to take care of world events?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I have enjoyed discussing these matters with the member. What I was advocating in my speech is that we can take a posture of non-interventionist intolerance in many cases. That is recognizing the limits we have in our capacity. We cannot be everywhere. We cannot be actively fighting with every opponent to freedom and democracy. However, that does not mean that we should tolerate their repression or we should ignore human rights abuses that take place.

There is a great alignment between our values and our interests. When we stand for freedom in the world, there is clarity about our position, and that allows us to build support and alliances among nations and also peoples who share our conviction. Very often, the advocacy for us to ignore our values for our interests actually ends up undermining our long-term interest. Standing for a set of convictions, being clear that our nation stands for something on the world stage, is consistent with both our values and our interests.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, just this past week, President Zelenskyy tried to get support in Washington, and the right wing there tried to stop support

for a military fight against the illegal invasion by Putin. It was the same week that the Conservatives decided that their leader, their foreign affairs critic and their defence critic would make sure they were seen standing in the House multiple times voting against Operation Unifier. I was looking at Operation Unifier and thinking, what is it that could be so offensive to the Conservatives that they had to make such a clear statement? The fact is that we have Canadian soldiers on the ground, Canadian soldiers doing military training and Canadian soldiers doing medic training, and yet the Conservatives are out to undermine that support for Ukraine.

I would refer to the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, who wrote, “For the second time this month, Conservative MPs undermine support for Ukraine by voting against funding for Operation Unifier.... Canada’s support for Ukraine should be unanimous and beyond political games.”

That is what the Ukrainian Canadian Congress has said. Why is it that the Conservatives stood up with their leader to vote against some fundamental military support for Ukraine? The message they are sending is very clear: They are undermining—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan an opportunity to answer.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, my hon. friend is not as ignorant as he pretends to be. He knows that we support Operation Unifier, and he knows that we started Operation Unifier—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, we asked a question about Conservative policy on military, and they start calling us “ignorant”. That is unparliamentary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is unparliamentary and the hon. member should know better.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, if you judge it unparliamentary, I will withdraw it out of deference to your office.

The member knows the following facts. He knows the Conservatives support Operation Unifier. He knows that we started Operation Unifier, actually. He also understands that when we have budget and confidence motions, members are not just voting on the particular item on the table; they are voting regarding whether or not they have confidence in the government. Conservatives do not have confidence in the current government, which is why, when given the chance, we voted non-confidence in the government at every single occasion. Does that mean that we oppose every single spending item? Clearly it does not. That is obviously absurd. We voted non-confidence in the government every chance we got.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for raising this very important debate, considering the travesty that is going on in Afghanistan, in particular against women and girls. Reports are coming out, as recently as today, talking about the 1.7 million foreigners in Pakistan they are looking to push back to where they came from. This in particular has a huge impact on women and girls who are from Afghanistan, including those who were the breadwinners in their families, such as widows who lost their husbands during the conflict and who worked when they were allowed to work during the west's intervention. Now, to quote their words, they are saying, "We will be eliminated if we return to Afghanistan."

What can the member add about the importance of the west's continued participation in standing up against these autocratic regimes around the world? At the same time, can he address the fatigue he talked about and how it requires that long-term sort of thinking in order for us to continue to support those who need our support around the globe?

• (1540)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his service in Afghanistan and to our country.

It has been inspiring to me to see the deep bonds that were established between Canadian Forces members who served and the Afghan people, and to see the incredible lengths that people who served in Afghanistan have gone, since the pullout in 2021, to assist and support the Afghan people. That goes for not only this member and other members of the House, but also many veterans and members of our military, who are not in elected office but who are nonetheless doing everything they can to raise money and take other actions. I want to salute the service of our veterans and their work supporting the Afghan people. They understand. They have made these sacrifices.

To the member's question about fatigue, those who fought and served understand the immense sacrifice. They have made far more sacrifices than any of us who did not serve in that way have made. They understand the importance of us continuing to stand with the Afghan people.

This is why I talked about the proposals in my speech of refusing to legitimize or tolerate the Taliban and continuing to apply maximum pressure while engaging with and supporting opposition groups. Different opposition groups are organizing and coming together in various ways to oppose the Taliban. We should be opposing the Taliban while actively engaging and supporting the opposition, recognizing that the fight is not over, that it is the birthright of the Afghan people to have freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and that we must be with them until the job is finished.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as many would know, very few if any members have brought forward concurrence reports as the member opposite has. That, as the member knows, prevents debate on government legislation. Today, we were supposed to be debating Bill C-56, and the member has chosen to bring forward another concurrence report.

Does the member not recognize or have any sort of desire to see government legislation? Why does he consistently want to bring forward concurrence reports to try to frustrate the legislative process here in Ottawa?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the House of Commons standing orders provide various opportunities for the government to put forward its legislative agenda, and they also provide various opportunities for opposition members to put forward ideas for debate that are priorities for them and their constituents.

The way the schedule works on Mondays is that we have an hour for Private Members' Business, the government has available two hours for Government Orders and then we have Routine Proceedings, which is a time when members can move motions and table petitions. I could go through all the mechanics of that, but the hon. member knows them well. He knows that concurrence motions and debates are part of the process.

Fundamentally, this is an extremely important issue. There are Afghan Canadians and people of goodwill around the world who I know are watching this debate and are interested in the outcome of this debate, because they are concerned with the cause of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Afghanistan. This is not about raising that issue only but about raising the broader issues of this new cold war we are in and the lessons we can learn from what happened in Afghanistan for other situations.

I think this is an extremely important issue to be raised in the House of Commons. It is the right place to debate it. It is the right time to debate it. I certainly will make no apologies for putting that idea forward at this time.

• (1545)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Before we resume debate, I wish to clarify for the House that the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has moved concurrence in the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, not the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, which is on a very similar topic. The Chair misspoke earlier in putting the motion to the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the most appropriate place to start off is the line of questioning that I just asked the member opposite. Prior to question period getting under way, we were having a healthy discussion at the third reading stage of Bill C-56. I know I was not the only one prepared to come to the House to debate Bill C-56.

Routine Proceedings

What I would like to talk about for the next number of minutes is the purpose of moving concurrence reports such as this particular report. It is not necessarily to have the focus of the House of the Commons on debating the issue the member has attempted to bring forward. As we saw in a number of questions, issues aside from Afghanistan were raised. Rather, it is about a rationale and reasoning that I believe, as many others believe, we see from this particular member: He stands in his place time and time again in order to prevent debates of the government agenda. One only needs to look at the timing of when the member brings forward concurrence debates. They are all on the government's legislative dates when we are going to be debating substantive legislation.

This morning, as members would know, we brought forward Bill C-56. Prior to question period getting under way, I was the one speaking to it. Bill C-56 is very important to Canadians in a very real and tangible way. It is about an issue that Canadians are very much concerned about from coast to coast to coast. To amplify that, all one needs to do is take a look at the last remarks, because as we were getting to question period, I had to stop speaking on the legislation because we were entering into members' statements, followed then by question period.

It is interesting that a big focus of question period was in fact the issues I was talking about in the lead-up to members' statements. Also, if we go through members' statements, we will find that these were the issues being amplified. Members of the House, outside of the Conservative caucus, came to the House believing that we would be debating Bill C-56. That is not to say that what is happening in Afghanistan today and what has taken place since 2001 are not important issues. We recognize many of the horrors that have taken place in Afghanistan. We understand the important role that Canada has to play in it.

However, we also need to recognize at this point in time the types of tactics and efforts from the official opposition, the Conservative Party, a minority inside this chamber, today to prevent debates and legislation from passing. A very good example of this is in a question raised by the New Democrats. We talk about Canada and its role in Afghanistan, and the member talked about the alliance that seems to be out there, indirectly referring to Russia, Afghanistan and like-minded countries. Then he posed a question about the Conservative Party with respect to Ukraine. I think it was a legitimate question to be asking the Conservative Party. Again, we saw the tactics it used last Thursday and Friday. The response was laughable. The question was why the Conservative Party not once, not twice, but I believe three times in total voted specifically to deny Ukraine funds. One of those funds was with respect to the—

• (1550)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have a point of order from the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, we are well into the speech and have not heard anything about the report. We have heard about procedure and about some matters that are entirely unrelated. He is talking about a question that has nothing to do with this report—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The member has mentioned Afghanistan and the service. The hon.

member still has 15 minutes to get to the heart of the report. The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge knows that we have a certain tolerance for when members get to the point of a report.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the point I was getting to is that Operation Unifier is a military operation, and the member who introduced the motion talked about the Canadian Forces and the role we played in it. Another member tries to imply that it is not relevant, and he needs to give his head a shake. At the end of the day, it is absolutely relevant to be talking about Operation Unifier, a project that is taking place in Ukraine, and the Conservatives' behaviour, which is not consistent with the motion they are moving today.

On one occasion, the Conservatives voted directly on that. On two other occasions, they voted against Ukraine. When the member was asked about it, what was his answer? Well, it was a confidence issue. We went line by line on expenditures, and the Conservative Party had a choice. They did not have to vote specifically against something they believe in. To try to give the impression that it is a confidence vote is absolutely bogus.

The bottom line—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. member. I have a point of order from the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I realize that I have not been here that long, but as it would certainly appear the member has been here much longer than I have, he would well know that every vote against the budget item from the opposition, which it is appropriately meant to do, would be a confidence vote against the government for the reckless fiscal attitude it has concerning—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I do understand the point the hon. member is trying to make, and I am sure the parliamentary secretary knows full well that all budget votes are confidence votes. It is on the record now.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that there is a lot of regret on the other side over the types of things they voted against. They can still have all the confidence votes they want, but at the end of the day, the Conservatives have shown very clearly that they do not support Ukraine in a fashion they like to believe they do.

This is consistent with the style and pattern we have witnessed from the Conservative Party over the last six months and more, where members opposite try to give a false impression and say they had no choice and had to vote against Ukraine on all three occasions, which is just not true. They could have still vote with a lack of confidence on a wide variety of budgetary motions. They did not have to vote against those budget requests.

Routine Proceedings

Operation Unifier, as an example, is very relevant to what we are talking about today, because we are talking about the ways that we conduct our international affairs, whether it is diplomacy or with our Canadian Forces. As we went through the budget, line by line as someone has pointed out, the Conservatives had a choice and they chose to vote on the side of Russia. That is in essence what they did—

• (1555)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member to avoid such suggestions, because we do not want to assume reasons.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, you addressed my point very well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there is no turning back.

When we look at the different lines that were actually voted on, for the time the members were there to actually vote. I want to make sure I am parliamentary on this; at times, the Conservative Party showed up at 50%. It got down to about 49% or something of that nature for voting—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We cannot reference the presence or absence of members in the House, and the parliamentary secretary knows that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that is true.

Suffice it to say that, when it started to get a little late, some members felt it was more important to have some sleep than to actually participate in a vote. I am not saying—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): This implies they were absent from the chamber. We cannot project indirectly what we cannot do directly. I ask the hon. member to try not to incite disruption.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think the point is made.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to clarify your point here. We are in a hybrid Parliament, so people are in this chamber regardless of whether they are here or voting virtually.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member definitely has a point. People can vote virtually or in person.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. Who votes and who does not vote is a matter of Hansard. It is a matter of record. The hon. member did not mention certain members who were or were not here, but mentioning that half of a particular caucus was not there for a vote is a matter of Hansard, and I think that could be mentioned in debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is true that the records of our voting are public. Members can mention that people did not vote, but not that they were not in the chamber.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, to the last point of order, the member is right in the sense that if we are in hybrid, it means that members can either be inside the chamber or they can be on screen. However, after midnight, maybe Conservatives were in bed. I would suggest that, at the end of the day, let us push that to the side and talk in terms of why we are debating this particular motion today.

The Conservative Party would like to give the impression—

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would point out that it is the Liberal government, which the member is a part of, that has allowed members to vote from bed. They are good with that. We have opposed that all the way. It is the Liberals who moved that into Parliament—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Let us start with the debate. We are not redoing that point.

I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to complete his speech.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I was moving on from the Conservatives being in bed. At the end of the day, it is up to the Conservatives, and I get the sense that they have a guilt thing going on. However, just because a significant percentage preferred sleep as opposed to voting, they are the ones who have to justify it, not me. If they are feeling a little guilty about that, that is fine.

Where I have a problem is when Conservatives try to lump all those votes and say that they had a right to vote against each one of them, because—

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It appears that we are about 12 minutes into this speech, and we have not heard one word from the member that is relevant. This report that we are debating is about the criminal—

• (1600)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): He was about to start when he was interrupted. I am going to give him another chance.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member across the way has not been listening very carefully at all. I have made reference, right from the very beginning, in regard to the report.

I have both motions, the motion that ultimately went to the wrong committee, in terms of the concurrence report, and the one that we are actually supposed to be debating. It is not that difficult. It is about Afghanistan and the Taliban. When we talk about Afghanistan and the Taliban—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I find it fascinating, Madam Speaker. The member on this side of the House clearly outlined the government business that is allowed, the rules in this chamber and how he can present a concurrence motion, but the member continues to say that something else should be debated at this time. That is exactly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are talking about the two reports.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, we all know very clearly that concurrence in a report is an acceptable measure in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, it is. The hon. member—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Otherwise, Madam Speaker, you would, of course, have ruled that it was unacceptable to present it at that time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Absolutely, it is admissible. It is part of the rules. The hon. parliamentary secretary was referring to the two reports that caused confusion with the Chair, not with the House.

The hon. parliamentary secretary is rising on the same point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, interruption is the game the Conservative Party is playing. I find it highly inappropriate, because it disrupts the train of thought.

At the time the member stood up to say that I was not being relevant, I had both motions in my hand and was going to read the one that we are debating. That is definitely relevant, even for the simplest mind to understand, I would suggest.

I would like to be able to continue with my speech and not be constantly interrupted by—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are not going to debate that any longer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we are talking about a report that the Conservative Party felt was such an important issue that it had to be debated today. This comes right from committee. The motion reads, “That the committee report to the House that it firmly denounces the Taliban and rejects any recognition or legitimization of their control over Afghan territory.” I will stop there for a moment.

I do not know about the Conservatives, but no one on the Liberal benches, and I suspect no one in the NDP, the Bloc or even the Green Party, would dispute what I just read. Duh. Does the Conservative Party really believe this is what Canadians want us to be talking about today when, earlier, we were talking about affordability and purpose-built rentals, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80,000 homes being built? That is one aspect of competition. That is what we are supposed to be talking about. That is what is on the minds of Canadians.

What is on the minds of Conservatives in this chamber? I will continue to say what is on their minds.

The motion goes on to say, “In particular, the committee denounces the Taliban system of gender discrimination”. Who in this chamber does not support that? Are we all not discouraged by what the Taliban has done with regard to gender discrimination? It is very real. Women are losing their lives to the Taliban. Do we really think that, at this point in time, as we get closer to winding up the session, there is any indifference on that particular issue? I would ask anyone in the chamber who disagrees with that to put up their hand. I suspect no one will. However, the Conservatives feel it is so important that we need to talk about this.

I suspect that if we were to do a Hansard search, which I have not done, we would find that I have talked about this issue in the past. I would be prepared to bet a Big Mac on that.

I want to continue the debate that we had just before question period. That is what I want to talk about, because that is what was on the legislative agenda. That is the agenda the majority of MPs came to this chamber to talk about today. Prior to question period, the Conservatives were getting a little exercise and stood on points of order so that they would not allow me to say what I wanted to say. It is a form of censorship, I would suggest, and everyone knows how sensitive I can be at times. I was emphasizing a pattern that I saw in the leader of the Conservative Party's office. That is why we have this motion before us today.

We will remember the big threat made last week by the leader of the Conservative Party, whom I did not see very much during the votes. He made the statement—

• (1605)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary knows he may not have seen the person, but they could have been participating virtually, as is allowed by this House. I would refrain from making such references.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: My apologies, Madam Speaker. They are a little sensitive on the other side for some reason today. I suspect some of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There is a point of order from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I have been trying to follow him, but my colleague keeps getting upset and then losing his train of thought. The issue is not about who was not in the House. He can say who was in the House. For example, the Conservative leader was clearly in the House to vote against Ukraine. It is one time I saw him, so that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is debate; it is not a point of order.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that is a point well taken, for sure.

Why are we talking about this today? It is because the Conservative leader made a decision, which was made very clear to all Canadians last week. He said, “We are going to stick it to the government. We'll go to Christmas. We want them to axe the tax.”

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, now they are all applauding. They like this. Now I am really relevant to them. All one has to do is say “axe the tax”, and they think one is relevant.

This is the problem that I started to get into prior to question period. Then they were all jumping up like beans, and I was not able to conclude those remarks.

Routine Proceedings

Let us talk about this resolution, and I will suggest that there is a common theme. It is much like when the leader of the Conservative Party made it very clear, coast to coast to coast, that the Conservative Party was going to do what it could on one issue, which is the price on pollution. This is because Conservatives really do not believe in climate change.

At the end of the day, what is happening is that the MAGA right, the Donald Trump far right in the States, is creeping its way into Canada and coming through the leader of the Conservative Party's office. This is why we are debating the motion. Part of this is their thinking that it does not necessarily have to be true; they just say what they think will look good on a bumper sticker. What has happened—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is rising on a point of order, on relevance, I am sure.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Yes, Madam Speaker. You could guess it was going to be about relevance, because the member has not made any relevant comments in his entire speech. He has been given tremendous latitude, and your generosity is a credit to you, but bring this man to order.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): A lot of latitude has been given, yes. I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to bring it to the relevance of the report.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, if the member is prepared to give me leave, I would be more than happy to ensure the balance is as relevant as can be.

I want to finish up on my point about the leader of the official opposition's office and the way in which, in looking at this particular motion of concurrence today, it determined that this was more important. Afghanistan, the harms that have taken place and Canada's role in Afghanistan are the things the leader of the Conservative Party wanted to talk about today, as opposed to the government legislation that dealt specifically with the issues of the day.

If I were to provide comment on Afghanistan, I could go from 2001 to 2014, when Canada pulled out its troops. The year 2014 was a pivotal time, as was 2001, when the decision was made by Jean Chrétien to stay out of Iraq and to contribute to Afghanistan and what was taking place there. We have many individuals in our caucus who are accepting of issues such as women's rights and education for children. I would suggest they are universally accepted. Many Canadian values that we fought for in Afghanistan are things the Taliban is absolutely opposed to; there is no doubt that we are very serious about Afghanistan. Canada has a strong leadership role to play, not only in Afghanistan but around the world, and there is a time and place.

I would suggest that this is not the time for this debate. We should be debating the issues Canadians are wanting to see debated—

• (1610)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, there was a lot in that rambling bit of incoherent, non-relevant debate. It was not relevant to the motion and the report. There are some things that bear correction.

I wonder if the member can verify and confirm that he is aware that the bill we are not debating is time allocated and that this debate on concurrence is not slowing down or interfering with the government's agenda. Is he aware that the motion we are debating was on notice, so anybody who was coming prepared to speak today may have been aware that this motion could be moved, as it was on notice, and that it is up to members to move concurrence motions during Routine Proceedings?

That is the only time in the rubric where such a motion can be moved if members, such as the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, would wish to debate that particular motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, do we see some irony here?

The member did not ask anything about the motion. He stood up many times on points of order, and heckled from his seat that I am not being relevant, but then he stood up and did not even talk about the motion.

I would suggest to the member that he needs—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, it is customary, in the House, to give members an opportunity to withdraw their remarks and correct the record when they say something false. He falsely said that I did not address the motion in my remarks. I asked him if he was aware, and I was correcting the points he had made—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member did ask a very precise question. I would remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that he did refer to specific elements of the hon. member's speech.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, he did say the word “motion”. That is very good, but that is about it. Members can read what the hon. member—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would just remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge was asking the hon. parliamentary secretary a specific question to the hon. member's speech, not to the motion.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member asked the question on the process and the process is such that there are many motions of concurrence on the Order Paper that could be introduced, not just this motion. The member would know that. The member would also know that the legislative agenda today was to deal with Bill C-56. The member would also know how many times the Conservatives will cry because they do not have enough debate time—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give other members the opportunity to ask questions.

Routine Proceedings

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I took the time to find the motion that we are debating today, because the Conservative Party seems to be a bit confused. The motion reads as follows:

In particular, the committee denounces the Taliban system of gender discrimination, systemic violence targeting minority communities...and other violations of fundamental human rights.

This motion clearly refers to human rights. However, last year, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the Conservative member for Peace River—Westlock made a video on Facebook Live in which he enthusiastically applauded and said that access to abortion in Canada was the greatest human rights tragedy of our time.

Despite all that, the first thing that the newly elected Leader of the Opposition did after his party's leadership race was to appoint the member for Peace River—Westlock as human rights critic. He also made that member the vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

How out of touch with Quebeckers and Canadians does the Leader of the Opposition have to be to appoint someone who applauds when access to abortion is reduced in another country?

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the impact of the whole issue of the court decision on *Roe v. Wade* was, I think, fairly profound.

There was a great deal of disappointment from coast to coast here in Canada. One has to be concerned, in how the Conservative right responded to the decision. It, in essence, implied, at the very least, and I am being kind, support. I think that really raises the issue to the degree in which—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, the member is straying into complete falsehood here. There has not been any acquiescence on any abortion debate in the United States by any party in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member is answering a question from another colleague.

I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to conclude to give other members a chance to ask a question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I was responding to a specific Bloc question, in which I have implied, through my comments, that I agree, in principle, with what the member is saying. The Conservative Party's stance on the issue was a great disappointment to many Canadians.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, I will challenge the member on that again, and I will challenge you to correct the member because the Conservative Party has no stance on that issue. It has never stated any stance on such matter—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order, I want to make sure it is very clear on the record that the Conservative Party of Canada filibustered a study in the foreign affairs committee for 16 weeks so that it would not have to study women's reproductive rights. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is entering into debate.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, they are saying that what I said is false. The member I mentioned, the member for Peace River—Westlock, did a Facebook Live video when the *Roe v. Wade* decision was overturned. He said that it was excellent news, that this was his mission in politics and that this kind of decision should be made in Canada. If members are saying that it is not true, they should go watch the video. It is still online.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are getting into a debate about what was seen or not seen.

I will let the member for Timmins—James Bay ask a question.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the conversation. I was really shocked that the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan took this discussion of the Taliban and then tried to talk about support for Ukraine.

We are not going to say who was not in the House, but in the House I saw the leader of the Conservative Party, the foreign affairs critic and the defence critic sending a very clear message. They stood up to vote against Operation Unifier. They stood up to vote against Ukraine in the same week the right-wing in the United States shut down Zelenskyy, and at the same time that Orban in Hungary, and there are certainly Conservatives over there who are friends of Orban, has been undermining Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people.

What does my colleague think about the Conservatives having the gall to pretend that they are supporting Ukraine, when the Ukrainian Canadian Congress has called out the Conservative leader and his party—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the president of Ukraine came to Canada in September and signed a Canada-Ukraine modernization trade agreement. A couple months later, we had that legislation brought forward to the House. Games were being played. Ultimately, the Conservative Party of Canada voted against the trade agreement. Now it is filibustering the trade agreement.

Over the marathon votes, the Conservatives, on three separate occasions, voted against supports to Ukraine. I say shame on them, from the leadership down, for not supporting Ukraine—

Routine Proceedings

• (1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to answer the member's question, and then I am going to ask him a favour.

The reason we are debating this and why it is so important for this to be debated today, as I read in my previous intervention, is that women who are stuck in Pakistan and are being forced to return to Afghanistan will be eliminated. Those are their words, not mine.

There are a number of Afghans who are supposed to come to Canada as part of the programs that were put in place along with the SIM program. We are now hearing rumours that the program is frozen and people's application processes are not being moved forward. Canada said it was going to help these people. There are lots of Afghans, whom I know personally and through my connections, who are still stuck in Afghanistan, and now they are in limbo.

We are also coming up on the one-year anniversary of one of the former Afghan women MPs being murdered by the Taliban regime. We have had an all-party team working for over a year, and how many of those women MPs are here?

I ask the member to use his influence as a parliamentary secretary to ensure these Afghans, especially these Afghan women and children, are given the opportunity to get to Canada and are not frozen in limbo where they face certain death if they get sent back to Afghanistan.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I appreciate member's mentioning the contributions to the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, and all those who have served. There are about 40,000 Canadian soldiers that were there, from what I understand.

If the Conservative Party really felt this was the type of debate that should be taking place, it could do it through a take-note debate or an emergency debate. There are different forms that would have enabled the debate to take place. The member himself could have been speaking to this and introducing it. That might have given it a bit more credibility.

There is absolutely no doubt that we, as a government, had no idea the opposition was going to be bringing forward this concurrence debate. That is why I believe this is another example of the Conservatives using concurrence motions as a way to frustrate government legislation.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, it would be nice if the government would help out in this way, but the member is admitting that they do not know the rules of the House and that they did not know what was on the agenda. Therefore, I am rising on a point of order to say that this is the normal business of the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is indeed normal procedure, but the hon. member was referencing the specific report being brought to concurrence.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thought this moment would never come. It may come up from time to time.

I was not expecting to give a 20-minute speech about this. I had prepared a speech on another committee report, but in the end, things changed.

In my opinion, the Conservatives may have slept too much. Looking back on the votes that were held during the 30-hour voting marathon, the members who voted the least were certainly not members of the other parties. I do not know what they were thinking. They sort of remind me of Icarus. Do my colleagues know the story of Icarus, the man who wanted to fly the fastest and highest? Before long, he burned his wings. When he got close to the sun, all of a sudden his wings caught fire and he quickly fell back to Earth. I get the impression that is what happened here.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I am not seeing the relevance of some of the comments my colleague made on voting and who was here or not. We know from the record, and it is public record—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I do not think the hon. member said who was here or not here, just who got sleep and who did not get sleep.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, maybe I got it wrong after all. Perhaps they did not get enough sleep, if they are raising points of order like that.

As I was saying, the story of Icarus is very interesting. He was so sure of himself that he thought he had come up with an excellent solution, but in the end, he found himself in trouble and landed on his head very quickly.

We saw this again in the 30-odd hours we spent voting. All I saw was a Liberal caucus that had not been united at all since the fall suddenly come together. I saw the ammunition given to the other parties in the House when I looked at exactly who was going to vote on which economic measures. It really reminds me of Icarus.

This brings me to the motion before us today, which also reminds me a little of Icarus. This motion gives me a chance to talk about human rights and what has been discussed in various committees, not only the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but also the committee that deals with international human rights, specifically, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and the Special Committee on Afghanistan. Human rights have been discussed extensively. That topic was the foundation of all the conversations we had in those committees.

Routine Proceedings

I want to come back once again to one of the first decisions the Leader of the Opposition made when he was elected leader of the Conservative Party. The decision had to do with human rights. How did I come to that conclusion? It was easy. As vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, I saw the change in the Conservative membership of that committee following the election of the Conservative leader, the member for Carleton. Suddenly, I saw the member for Peace River—Westlock become vice-chair of the subcommittee. I looked into him because I like to be thorough in my work. I want to know my new committee colleagues. I did my research and I realized to my astonishment and disappointment, but mostly astonishment, that the member had made a live video just after getting off a plane, when he found out that the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned *Roe v. Wade*, making access to abortion in the United States more difficult and, in some cases, a criminal offence. This is what I was asking my Liberal colleague about just now. The Conservative member applauded that ruling and said, in that same video, that access to abortion was the worst human rights tragedy in Canada.

Here I am, faced with a person who is entitled to his opinions, but I know full well that they are light years away from Quebec's values in terms of abortion access and rights. This member was appointed by the leader of the official opposition to sit on this committee. What is more, the leader made him what he calls his shadow minister, meaning the opposition's critic on the matter. That means that if the Conservative Party had come to power, this guy could probably and possibly have ended up either as minister for international aid and development or as parliamentary secretary. This is a guy who says that access to abortion is the worst human rights tragedy in Canada. That is important.

I want to come back to this motion telling us that we need to talk about human rights. Of course everyone agrees with that. I will read it:

That the committee report to the House that it firmly denounces the Taliban and rejects any recognition or legitimization of their control over Afghan territory.

No one is raising their hand to say they disagree. I will continue:

In particular, the committee denounces the Taliban system of gender discrimination...

Now maybe a Conservative MP will stand up and oppose the motion.

No? Good. I will continue:

...systemic violence targeting minority communities...

No one has anything to say about that either? All right then.

...reprisals against former members of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces, attacks on freedom of the press, and other violations of fundamental human rights. The committee believes that the Taliban must remain a listed terrorist organization.

We are going to spend three hours debating this response and the tabling of the report by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, even though everyone is in agreement.

• (1625)

I mentioned Icarus. Unfortunately, they are bringing about their own downfall. I have to talk about human rights in connection with a motion that everyone agrees on. I have no choice but to continue.

This will take however long it takes, because that is how they want it. It was quite a job just to find out which committee report we were going to talk about today. As I said, there may be a minor breakdown in professionalism. That is so unlike them. I am not sure what is going on. Maybe they feel like they made a big mistake last week and that they keep making more. That is overconfidence. Overconfidence is always dangerous in life, whether at work or in sport. I have played team sports, and I can vouch for the fact that overconfidence is very dangerous. In the end, it can cost the team the game. However, I do not want to go overboard in giving advice. I will leave them to reflect on their own behaviour.

This report from the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights does contain something worthwhile. It is important to note that this is a result of what happened on the Special Committee on Afghanistan. When the committee began its work, we quickly realized that Canadian humanitarian organizations were unable to do their work because they were violating Canada's Criminal Code. I asked a non-governmental organization, or NGO, about that for the first time on February 7, 2022. I was told that, because the Criminal Code prohibits the funding of terrorism, which is a good thing, Canadian NGOs were unable to send humanitarian aid, such as medication and food, to vulnerable populations. The Criminal Code made it difficult to send such aid.

We set about putting pressure on the Liberal government. On that point, I should mention that I had a lot of help from the opposition parties, the NDP and the Conservative Party, to put pressure on the government, which was far too slow to act. It eventually introduced Bill C-41, which we passed. This legislation is not perfect; in fact, it is quite imperfect. I found this out last week during a committee meeting, when I asked NGO representatives about it. They told us that it had improved things a little, but that it was far from perfect and that certain aspects of the bill still prevent them from being able to do their work normally.

We talked about this in early February 2022, and the government introduced the bill a year later, in the winter of 2023. It was still at committee in the spring. All that happened more than 18 months after the UN had taken action with resolution 2615, which called for countries to amend their criminal codes so they could send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, and to adapt their laws accordingly. That UN motion, as well as the motions we moved in the various committees regarding humanitarian aid and the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations, were effective.

Routine Proceedings

As usual, the Liberal government is very slow to act and sometimes spends too long studying issues. Unfortunately, this is having a real impact on the ground. Some people suffered because Bill C-41 was not in force. Children died of starvation because humanitarian aid could not be delivered. This was documented in articles in reputable newspapers all over the world. Some families had to sell some of their children because they could not afford to feed them all. They had to sell some of their children, even though Canada had a moral obligation towards these people because it participated in operations in Afghanistan and had direct ties with Afghan interpreters, members of the Afghan security forces, and politicians in Afghanistan, especially women politicians. Canada had created programs to help women successfully participate in politics in Afghanistan.

Canada ensured that women can get involved in democratic public discourse in Afghanistan. When Canada left, it left these women to fend for themselves. They had to face the Taliban. If there is one thing that upsets the Taliban, it is a woman who stands up and takes part in democratic debate in her own country.

• (1630)

I think the Taliban's biggest fear is to see a woman become empowered and participate in democratic debate in Afghanistan. To the Taliban, that is the devil incarnate.

Canada had a moral duty to these people and it did not live up to that duty. It arrived a year too late with an imperfect bill, which we supported because we believe that a step forward is always good for the people that will benefit. However, this is not right. Canada is neither an economic nor military power. Canada has a history of leadership in international human rights. That is coming from a Quebec sovereignist. I am thinking of Lester B. Pearson's peacekeepers. To be fair to my Conservative friends, I will also mention Brian Mulroney, who contributed to the fall of the apartheid regime.

These things happened. Let us also consider Jean Chrétien, who had a major impact on friendly countries in Africa. That is part of Canada's history. I imagine that these actions were largely driven by the values of Quebecers, or I hope so. We have always been there. Humanitarianism started in Quebec, and Canada followed suit. So much the better if we can lead our Canadian friends in the right direction. We do it often. The child care system is just one example. I am not saying that Quebecers are better than Canadians. No one is better or worse; we are simply different. That seems the best way to put it.

The only thing I held against my friend Jean Chrétien was the fact that he would say that Canada was "the bestest country in the world". What country is second best, sixth best or eighth best? I do not know. I think there is no such thing as a best or worst people, a best or worst country. There are only different countries. Quebec is one of them and, one day, it will have everything it needs to become an independent nation. Perhaps I am getting off topic. Maybe it is because my Conservative friends added to the confusion today about the various motions we had to debate. I think it has affected me. I have to speak about a motion for 20 minutes when I only learned I had to talk about the motion two minutes before I took the floor.

Everyone agrees that we cannot let the Taliban continue to ensure that human rights are not upheld in Afghanistan. We cannot allow our humanitarian organizations, our NGOs, not to help them. That sums up what was said in the various committees, including the justice committee. Yes, we must keep the Taliban on the list of terrorist entities, and we must also allow our NGOs to deliver humanitarian aid on the ground there, because they know the ground, they have contacts and, above all, they have a big heart and want to help people. We can only applaud them for that. They need more support, and Canada should give them more. The government should give them more. They should not be overjoyed when access to abortion is restricted.

I will now be pleased to answer my colleagues' questions.

• (1635)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

I think we both have an affinity for Greek mythology. I really enjoyed that part of his speech. We both also value the evolution of human rights domestically, in Quebec and in Canada, as well as the influence Canada has had around the world.

I would like to ask the following question. Although our Conservative colleagues say they support human rights, it seems to me that they would rather choose which rights to extend to women, and may not fully support allowing them certain rights. I would like my colleague to tell us a little more about that.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I do find that disappointing, because I have a lot of friends in the Conservative Party. They know me. I am someone who likes to work with others. I have friends in every party. I am in politics to advance issues. I think that is easier when we work together and set partisanship aside.

However, there are fundamental values that push us to represent the people in our ridings, values that we cannot set aside. Those values are what motivate us to get up every morning to go to work for our constituents, our families and our children. When I hear that some members of the House are celebrating the fact that women's freedom to choose is being undermined, I cannot help but go to bed disappointed when thinking about all that.

I know that I, personally, will not be able to change those colleagues' minds, but I think that the friends that I have in the Conservative Party, those with whom I get along well, could have a little talk with their friends to ask them to think for a moment before they undermine women's right to choose.

Routine Proceedings

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are here debating an important motion about human rights in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover. A couple of members have said we should not be debating this. We do not need to be debating this for the full three hours. Those members have proceeded to give lengthy speeches on the subject. Of course, those members know the process is if they think it should maybe collapse on an item, then the most effective way they bring about that result is by not speaking to it. I am referring in particular to my friend across the way from Winnipeg North.

My friend from the Bloc, of course, found ways of connecting all kinds of other issues into the discussion, as sometimes happens in this place, but I do want to ask him a question about Afghanistan. I would like to hear his views on what we in Canada can do to concretely promote democratic development in Afghanistan. I think some people look at the situation and they feel a certain kind of fatalism. I believe there are still things we can do and we need to do to stand with the people of Afghanistan, that we cannot give up on the cause of freedom and democracy.

What does he think that Canada can concretely do to support the people of Afghanistan in their desire to realize democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I always enjoy working with my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

I think a lot more needs to be done. One of the things we could do, and this has already been proposed at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, which I am a part of, is not put a cap on the number of Afghan immigrants we welcome. The special measures program for Afghan refugees currently plans to welcome 40,000 Afghans.

Everyone agreed in committee. At least, the opposition parties did. The motion was moved by the NDP, and the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois supported it. The Liberals were somewhat receptive.

Earlier, my colleague talked about female members of Afghanistan's parliament whom we have been trying to evacuate from that country for a year. We have worked very hard together on that file, but it is still not resolved. We think that the government is too slow to bring these people to safety on Canadian or Quebec soil.

Once they are here, these people could use their voice because they are the best people to restore democracy in Afghanistan. We must help them come here so that they can be safe and deliver their speeches and be heard internationally. That is how they could help their country.

That is one way to help rebuild democracy in Afghanistan and ensure that the Taliban leaves the region for once and for all. I think that is one possible solution.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is always interesting to listen to my colleague and hear his thoughts. We are in this place right now having this debate. We were not told that this was coming. This has been a bit of a surprise for us. We are trying to think of ways that we could help the people of Afghanistan. I do not think there is a single person in this place who does not think that we should do everything we possibly can, particularly for the women and girls of Afghanistan.

I have to say, though, that I have the list here of the votes that we had over the 30-some hours that we stayed in the House voting because the Conservative Party thought that was a useful thing to do. While they are here telling us that it is vitally important that we support Afghanistan, three times for millions of dollars they voted against supporting international development and foreign affairs efforts. On one hand they are taking away the money that people in Afghanistan need. In Afghanistan right now, we have people who are severely food insecure, who need help, yet we have the Liberals with Bill C-41 making it very difficult to deliver that aid, and we have the Conservatives literally voting to stop it. In fact, they ran in the last election on cutting foreign aid by 25%. How do—

• (1645)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean the opportunity to respond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, it is not easy because, on the one hand, the Liberals are not helping us with Bill C-41, and on the other hand, we have people who want to cut back on international aid.

Canada currently spends 0.3% of its GDP on international aid. The UN is asking for 0.7% from countries like Canada. The average for OECD countries is around 0.42% or 0.43%.

Right now, under this government, our spending is lower than it was under the Harper government. Back then, it was at 0.32%. The current government is the one that has been the stingiest when it comes to devoting a percentage of its GDP to promoting international human rights.

When my colleague tells me that the Conservatives are not consistent and that they are not credible when they talk about international aid, we need only look at the votes held during those 30 hours. When I talked about Icarus at the beginning of my speech, this is the proof. I now have ammunition. The next time they talk about international aid, I can name all the members who voted against it. They really have no credibility.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his excellent speech on human rights, my colleague talked about a woman's right to make decisions about her body, to have an abortion if she so chooses.

As my colleague mentioned, among the Conservatives, there are some who applaud what happened in the United States and the fact that they took away women's rights. As we also know, when the subject of abortion has come up, we have seen Conservative committee chairs in tears, unable to chair their committee's work.

Conservatives are uncomfortable with that. They are standing up and raising points of order. They do not seem to have a position. They are not unanimous. There does not seem to be consensus on the issue of women's rights.

I would like my colleague to tell me whether, in his opinion, in Quebec and within the Bloc Québécois, there is a consensus on this issue.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, there has of course been a crystal clear consensus since the Chantal Daigle case, and I think that a woman's right to make decisions about her body is as fundamental to me as Quebec becoming a country. These are values that go together.

When I look at the other side, I see people who say they are pro-choice, yet they sit with people who are pro-life. In the Bloc Québécois caucus, that would simply be unthinkable.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand in this place and represent the good people of Edmonton Strathcona.

This is a concurrence debate. We were unaware that this was coming, and so I am going to talk a little bit from the heart and tell members a few of the things that I have been thinking about, now knowing that we are to debate this motion.

As we all know in this place, in 2021, Kabul fell and the Taliban took over Afghanistan. I do not think that any one of us can really understand the horrific consequences that had on women and girls in Afghanistan and what that shift, that change, means to women and girls in Afghanistan who had been given hope for so many years, because there was the possibility for them to go to school, and for them to be teachers, doctors, lawyers or members of Parliament. The women were able to participate in their culture and their country, but in 2021, that was all taken away from them.

I have been working with members across the floor. The member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound mentioned earlier that we have a cross-party group that is trying desperately to help some of those women MPs get to safety. It is unbearable how slow it is. One of the worst days I have had as a parliamentarian was waking up and finding out that one of those members of Parliament had been murdered. I know that the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound feels the same as me. I know that all of us in this place are absolutely horrified that these people have not been able to be brought to safety, and so we are continuing to work with civil society, and we are continuing to work across aisles to make sure that we can bring these women to safety.

I also want to tell a bit of a positive story as well, because we often talk about women and girls in Afghanistan and the burden, trauma and absolute horror that they are facing. It has literally been described as one of the worst places on earth to be female. When I am in my riding I like to talk to classes. I think talking to students about democracy and how to be involved in democracy is very important. I think it is a big part of my job. I was a teacher before I was a politician. I was talking to a grade 6 class about how devastating it is that education had been taken away from women and girls in Afghanistan, and a little girl in the front row put up her

Routine Proceedings

hand and told me that she was from Afghanistan. She had gotten out of Afghanistan and come to Canada. She was in the front row, and she was studying. She was in school, and she was learning. It is stuff like this that makes me think that we have to fight so much harder.

I have a dear driver, a lovely guy, and his daughter is from Afghanistan. She came to the House last week and spent some time with us here. She sat and watched question period. I hope we were all behaving, although I must say I doubt it. However, it is a pretty important thing to know that there are girls and women from Afghanistan who are getting that education. It means a lot to me.

I do think that it is important that this place be seized with what we can do to help women and girls in Afghanistan. I do think that it is important that we talk about foreign issues and that we talk about humanitarian support. Canada is not playing the meaningful role it needs to play. We have not lived up to our obligations. We have not lived up to our reputation. We have not lived up to what we should do. Our ODA is extraordinarily low.

We are really good at saying things like “We have a feminist international assistance policy”, but we are not very good at actually implementing it. This government loves to tap its chest and say that it is a feminist government. In fact, government members keep telling us that there is a feminist foreign policy, although nobody has ever seen it.

The fact of the matter is, if we are going to be a country with a feminist international assistance policy, which I fully support and in fact I helped write the policy before I was elected, then we need to stand up for women and girls, and that does not just mean in concurrence debates. It does not just mean that when the MP for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan decides he wants to mess with what is going on in the House he can call a concurrence debate and cry crocodile tears for Afghan women and girls.

● (1650)

He did not vote last week to support international development spending; he voted three times to not support international development spending. The Conservative members voted three times to not provide support for women and girls around the world. Folks have been talking to us today about the reproductive rights of women and girls. We know that, under Stephen Harper, the Conservatives cut that completely out of international development funding. I can tell the House something right now: When support for abortion is cut, it does not stop abortion; it stops safe abortion, and people die.

When I asked to do a study on women's rights in the international human rights subcommittee, the Conservative member from Peace River who sits on the committee said he was not interested in doing a study on the rights of women but would be more than happy to do a study on the rights of the preborn, not women who have been born, not women who are in our world who are struggling, but the preborn.

Routine Proceedings

We all know what this is about; it is about the Conservatives' trying to change the channel from their appalling voting record. It is all about the fact that they are trying to change the channel from the fact that they voted against the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement, voted against Operation Unifier and voted against support for Ukraine. My goodness, Conservatives voted against the human rights museum. Honestly, who does that?

I was at home this weekend. It was my son's 16th birthday, and I would like to have the indulgence of the House to wish my son a very happy 16th birthday. I was sitting with my family, and members may be surprised to learn that my family is very non-political. None of them can really understand why they have a member of Parliament in the family. We are not one of those families. They all asked me about the nonsense in the House. They wanted to know what that nonsense was, when members had to sit here for 30 hours. I told them they would not believe it, but it cost \$2 million for the Conservatives to do the little fundraising kerfuffle that they thought was so important. They asked me whether the Conservatives thought it was a good use of time and whether they thought it was what Canadians want from their politicians. Today is a great day for me, because New Democrats got dental care for Canadians. The Conservatives got a concurrence debate on an issue that their voting record shows they do not even care about. There is where we are at, folks.

Let us talk a little about some of the issues with regard to Afghanistan. I can talk about international development, foreign affairs and international humanitarian law all day, and I am happy to do it. At the initial time when we heard we were doing a concurrence debate, it was going to be about Bill C-41, or the aid to Afghanistan bill. Of course, the Conservatives must have made a mistake, because they do not actually care what they are bringing forward to the House. They are just trying to come up with something they could throw up as a shield. They got the wrong bill and the wrong concurrence motion. Then we had to sort of change direction a little. However, since they had initially wanted us to talk about Bill C-41, I am game. I am keen to talk about Bill C-41, which the NDP could not support. We were the only party in the House that did not vote for the bill, because it was such a flawed piece of legislation.

Let me explain a little. International humanitarian law exists in the world, and it is very clear that organizations working on international humanitarian efforts have certain protections so they can do that work. These are the people we ask to go into the world, into the most dangerous, most heartbreaking situations that we have on the globe. They do that so they can bring food, shelter and life-saving humanitarian aid. There are international humanitarian law standards in place. Instead of using those standards the way that Australia, Europe, the U.S. and all sorts of countries did, the Liberal government found a weird convoluted route whereby it was kind of like one had to opt out. One is a terrorist until one opts out; this is basically how it works. One has to get a special pass to give humanitarian assistance.

• (1655)

We were able to get some carve-outs through the legislation. We were able to get some of that to work, but I sat in the committee meetings and can tell members that the people who wrote the legis-

lation, and the members of those committees, do not understand how international development works. It does not happen in a sterile environment. It does not start on day one and end on day 12. It is not as definable as that.

The legislation that was put in place is very problematic. In fact, an article that came out on the CBC says that aid groups still say that Ottawa is hampering work in Afghanistan. We started asking for the legislation in 2021. It took years for flawed legislation to come forward. I do not know how many times I stood in the House and asked questions about it. The legislation is still not working; it is still not acting properly. Organizations are still not able to deliver the aid. Realistically, if the Conservatives actually cared about the people of Afghanistan and about getting support to Afghans, they would be more concerned about making sure that the legislation is fixed. World Vision's policy director Martin Fischer says that he is "frustrated and bewildered" that the process is taking so long. He says, "It's hard to understand why the machinery of government is having a hard time putting in place what should be a pretty straightforward...process." The legislation is still not working. The aid is still not getting to Afghanistan.

As I mentioned it earlier, the Liberals, who have the lowest ODA, or official development assistance, that we have ever had in this country and who are abdicating their responsibility under a feminist foreign policy and a feminist international assistance policy, have brought forward legislation that is overly bureaucratic, is overly problematic and does not work. On the other side, we have the Conservatives, who, frankly, if one were to listen to them, probably do not like women very much.

This is where we are at with that. When I talk about—

• (1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Centre is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I would like you to ask the hon. member to withdraw that last sentence, please, because, frankly, we are very much in support of all Canadians, of all sexes, of all genders and of all sexualities.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is a point of debate, and I would like the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona to try not to ascertain that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, to be fair, I really should be more clear. It is only some members of the Conservative Party who have been very clear that they are not supportive.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. It is uncommon that I have to raise a point of order on one of my own colleagues, but on the issue in which she said that Conservatives were against women, it was the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan who brought a legislator from Uganda who called for the death penalty for LGBTQ people, so I do not think it is just women who—

Routine Proceedings

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are not going to start debate.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is out of order.

I am going to ask the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to withdraw his comment.

Please, we do not want to generate more acrimony.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, it is a fact, but I will withdraw it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member repeatedly spreads falsehoods on this issue. I spoke up and corrected him the last time the member spread this nonsense. It is complete nonsense. The committee in question invited an opposition member, with whom I disagree on many issues, as it happens, who very clearly said, in the context of the committee, that she did not agree with anything the member is saying.

This is completely false—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is debate, and it is totally outside the question of the speech that the hon. member made.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona did clarify what she meant. We are not going to touch other subjects. All of the other subjects that were raised are out of order.

The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I believe I heard you instruct the member for Timmins—James Bay to withdraw his comment. Did he? He has withdrawn it.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, frankly, I was on the foreign affairs committee when that witness came, so I can be very clear on that, certainly.

I want to talk about international humanitarian law. We were talking about the fact that international humanitarian law means that Bill C-41 was bad legislation that was unnecessary. Sometimes we forget in this place how important it is that Canada apply international law equally around the world. It is really important because it is our reputation at stake. It is what gives us the moral ability to talk to other countries and demand better of them. Right now, we are not applying international humanitarian law or international law equally. I will give a perfect example. Right now, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois Party and, of course, the NDP are very supportive of Ukraine. I am delighted that Canada is playing such a key role in ensuring that humanitarian law is protected in that circumstance. We are using the tools that we have through the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice to ensure that Russia, which is an occupying force, is held responsible for the crimes it commits.

One of the interesting things about the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice is that they are unbiased and look at crimes committed by both sides. That is really key. They are entities that are able to use non-violent ways of resolving

conflicts, and that is an important thing that we have, as a globe. However, the International Criminal Court wants, and has asked the International Court of Justice, to undertake an investigation of the crimes that are currently happening and that have happened in Israel and Palestine, and Canada is playing a spoiler in that situation. From my perspective, there is not a soul in this place who is not absolutely horrified and appalled by what Hamas did on October 7. It is a terrorist group, full stop, and the hostages it has must be released immediately, but the Government of Israel is a government, and it and Netanyahu need to be held to a different standard than a terrorist organization is. What we need to make sure we see is that the people committing crimes, on either side of the conflict, are held responsible for those crimes.

What we need more than anything, which I think no one here is going to be surprised to hear me say, is a ceasefire so the 18,000 people who have already died, the majority of them women, children and babies, are not asked to pay the price for the terrorist organization that is Hamas. When Canada applies international law standards differently, and when it looks different in Ukraine than it does in Palestine, what do members think the rest of the world sees? What do they think the world sees from Canada, and how do members think we will respond? When we pick and choose human rights, pick and choose when to apply international humanitarian law and change the channel when it is inconvenient for us, that is not the Canada we need to be. Canada needs to be so much better than that.

I look at the situation we have seen in Yemen. I know it started under Stephen Harper, but, frankly, it has been eight years, which we have heard time and time again, and the Liberals have not fixed it. Why are we still sending arms to a country that is using them on civilians? Last week at the foreign affairs committee, I asked whether we even know whether any Canadian arms are being used in Gaza, and we do not know.

• (1705)

We have to do better. Canada has to do better. We have to have higher standards. We have to get back to that place where we punch above our weight. We are the country that is standing up for democracy and for international law. We stand up for human rights regardless of where one is, what colour one is and what religion one practices. These are the values that Canadians expect from their government and their parliamentarians, so we need to do more.

We need to do so much more for Afghanistan, but this charade the Conservatives have brought forward is a distraction. They are trying to change the channel. I want every one of the Conservatives over there to look in the mirror and ask themselves, if they ever become government or, would they cut foreign aid and cut supports for women and girls in Afghanistan. If there is even a spark of a chance that will happen, I want every single one of them to sit down and stop talking.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1863, 1867 to 1869, 1886, 1892, 1901, 1909, 1919, 1923, 1927, 1936 to 1938, 1865, 1870 to 1878, 1885, 1893 to 1895, 1902 to 1908, 1916 to 1918, 1921, 1926, 1934, 1939 and 1941.

Routine Proceedings

• (1710)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will now begin questions and comments with the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a brief question for my NDP colleague. She spoke a bit during her remarks about the fact that the NDP is calling for, from what I understand, an immediate ceasefire in the context of Israel and Gaza. As far as I have seen, the NDP has not called for an immediate ceasefire in the context of the Ukraine war. I am trying to understand the consistency of the position of the New Democrats with respect to that. Why are they taking one position in one case and a different position in another case?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, if the Conservative Party does not understand the difference between Russia invading and occupying Ukraine and Palestine being occupied, I do not know what to say. I do not know how to help the member. He may need to do a bit more reading and research if he is going to be the critic for international development. That is an absurd question to ask.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the member shared some of her personal stories on the issue, especially those from when she was a teacher.

I think a number of people would be offended by how this concurrence motion is being used as a tool to filibuster and prevent members from being able to speak to Bill C-56, which is all about affordability. When we take into consideration that the member made reference to international aid and how Conservatives intentionally and collectively voted against that money flowing, there seems to be a lot of irony there. Could she expand on that point?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, yes, it is pretty baffling that Conservatives would have voted against international development and foreign affairs. They voted against the support for gender equity work that was being proposed. All of these things are a clear indication to me that this is simply an attempt to weaponize debate in the House. As a tool to do that, they are using the pain and suffering of women and girls in Afghanistan. It is absolutely appalling.

I hope anyone watching recognizes that this is not about helping people in Afghanistan, but about preventing the Government of Canada and Parliament from getting supports to Canadians. The reason for that is the Conservative Party is more interested in power than it is in getting supports for Canadians.

Today, the NDP got dental care for Canadians, and I am so utterly proud. The Conservatives cannot tell me one single thing that they have gotten for Canadians.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question is really about whether the member for Edmonton Strathcona is as perplexed as I am when the Conservatives today are saying that women and girls internationally are so important. I do not remember any initiatives from the Conservatives for their opposition days, when they could have made this a topic, in their demands for special debates or in the proposals they

put before Parliament that would actually support women and girls internationally.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I do appreciate that some things have been done. Under Stephen Harper, there was an initiative called the Muskoka initiative, which did have some good pieces to it, but it took out any support for reproductive health care anywhere else in the world. It happened at a time when that was also being done in the United States, so all of a sudden there was very little aid being given for women's reproductive health around the world.

I worked in Uganda at one point in a small village. The person I shared lodging with was a doctor who was working with women who had struggled with their pregnancies, were pregnant, were seeking reproductive health care or were seeking abortion. The fact that funding was cut meant tens of thousands of women around the world would have died. They would have died without that support.

• (1715)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about the agenda today. The bill that was to be debated is one that all parties, or at least the Conservatives and the Liberals, already voted in favour of at second reading. It is also time allocated, so this concurrence debate is not slowing down the passage of that bill.

However, this concurrence debate does give members, including the member for Edmonton Strathcona, a chance to talk about the horrific circumstances of women and girls in Afghanistan and the government's lack of response, the government's failing of those women and girls in Afghanistan and the specifics of this report, which calls for the continued criminalization of the Taliban and non-recognition of it as a government. I wonder if she could spend some of the time left to talk about those failings of the government to protect women and girls in Afghanistan.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I do believe I spoke quite extensively during my speech about how Bill C-41 has failed women and girls in Afghanistan. I also spoke about the low ODA, or official development assistance, and how that has failed.

One thing I would also bring up is that we debated this in June. This is an issue the Conservatives are simply bringing up because they want to distract from what the House had on its schedule and was going to be working on. They can put a million concurrence debates up before the House and, frankly, none of them will actually move forward the agenda Canadians have asked us to come here to do.

We did this debate. We have already talked about this. I am more than happy to talk about international development, and the member is right, this did give me an opportunity to talk about my very favourite subject of all, which is human rights in Canada and around the world, particularly the rights of women and girls.

If they really wanted to support women and girls in Afghanistan, around the world and in Canada, they would not have voted against those supports for women and girls. They would not have voted against supports for the gender equity work being done. They would not have voted against foreign affairs being cut. They would not have run in the 2019 election on the 25% cut to development.

Routine Proceedings

They are not who they are trying to make themselves out to be today. It is very clear to me they want to be seen as something their voting record proves they are not.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was a little aghast at some of my colleague's comments, but she must realize we are actually in the opposition here. Our job is to oppose, and we did oppose many measures that were brought forward in the estimates. We went for a full night of voting against those because Canadians want the government to change. Canadians know the government has no concept of the affordability challenges they are facing, so I will defend us voting against all of those measures.

I will ask her, because she is not opposing the government at this point in any way whatsoever, how in the current debate she can support a government that opportunistically went into an election in 2021, at the very point when Afghanistan was falling. We could have saved so many of our people who helped us in Afghanistan, including women and girls who are no longer getting an education because of the government's actions. How does she continue that support?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, frankly, when I speak to my constituents, what they really want me to do is work with other parties to get supports for them, to do the work together to get things done. They do not actually want to see us fighting with each other in the House of Commons. They want to see us making sure things happen, such as dental care. "Dental care" is all I need to say about that.

There is one other thing I will say. The member asks how I can support the Liberals. I am very upset with many of the things the Liberals do, and the only thing I will say to the member is that I can only imagine it would be worse by multitudes if the Conservatives were to win the next election.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague would not answer the question about Ukraine, a democracy, and Israel, a democracy, both being threatened.

Why does the member insist on a ceasefire and not that Hamas surrenders? If Hamas were to surrender, it would mean a ceasefire, it would mean the release of hostages, and importantly, it would mean that Hamas would be held accountable for its atrocious actions.

Why not call for an unconditional ceasefire as opposed to using the words—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, pardon me. Why not call for an unconditional surrender as opposed to a ceasefire, which would leave Hamas in place and allow it to massacre Jews once again? Why?

• (1720)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, he sort of got it right there when he first said a ceasefire.

Here is the deal: I am trying to save the lives of children who have nothing to do with Hamas, women who have nothing to do with Hamas and the hostages who have nothing to do with Hamas.

In fact, all this violence against those women and children is not making a single person safer in Israel.

Absolutely, Hamas should surrender. It should not even exist. Of course, it should surrender, one hundred per cent. It is not very realistic that it is going to do it, as it is a terrorist organization, so that is not how it works. In the meantime, let us stop bombing children. Let us stop bombing—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I am trying to listen to the member's intervention. I think she has some insightful stuff to add to this debate, but the Conservatives are trying to shout her down while she speaks. Perhaps you could ask them to settle down, so I could—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are actually out of time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nepean.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, after the marathon 30 hours of voting in this House on Friday and taking a break for just over 14 hours, I was at an event organized by Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and University Women Helping Afghan Women to commemorate Human Rights Day. The event was also part of the 16 days of activism against gender violence. At this event, four accomplished Afghan women, all newcomers to Ottawa, talked about their experiences throughout both Taliban regimes.

A few weeks back, I hosted a meeting of over 60 Afghan Canadian community leaders in Ottawa and listened to their issues here and back in Afghanistan. I am regularly in touch with Shahr Hazara of One Afghan Woman Foundation, Tahir Shaaran of Canadian Hazara Advocacy Group, community leaders like Amin Karimi and many others who have been highlighting the challenges faced by the Hazara community in Afghanistan. I was also at a fundraising event organized by Madina Mashkooori and her team at Afghan Student Association raising money for the earthquake victims in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's actions have inflicted untold suffering upon the people of Afghanistan, undermining fundamental human rights and perpetuating a reign of terror. Let me first address the Taliban's abhorrent system of gender discrimination. Under its rule, women have been subjected to unspeakable oppression and denied the most basic rights that every human being deserves. They have been deprived of education, employment and the freedom to make choices about their own lives.

The Taliban's draconian interpretation of sharia law has systematically relegated women to second-class citizens, stifling their potential and relegating them to a life of subservience. This blatant gender discrimination is a gross violation of human rights and an affront to the principles of equality and dignity.

Routine Proceedings

Moreover, the Taliban's systemic violence targeting minority communities is reprehensible. Ethnic and religious minorities in Afghanistan have faced targeted persecution, discrimination and brutal attacks at the hands of the Taliban. Their fundamental rights have been trampled upon and their very existence threatened by the Taliban's agenda of oppression and marginalization. This flagrant disregard for the rights of minorities is utterly unacceptable and must be vehemently condemned.

I will talk about the Hazara community in a moment. The reprisals against former members of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces further highlight the Taliban's disregard for human rights and the rule of law. Individuals who dedicated themselves to the protection of their country and its people are now facing retaliation and violence simply for their service. This betrayal of those who stood to defend their nation is a despicable act that must not go unnoticed or unchallenged.

Equally concerning is the Taliban's assault on freedom of the press. Journalists and media personnel have been targeted and silenced, their voices stifled to prevent the dissemination of truth and information. A free press is the cornerstone of democracy and the Taliban's efforts to muzzle it represent a direct attack on the principles of transparency, accountability and the right to information.

In the face of these egregious violations of human rights and the rule of law, I firmly believe that the Taliban must remain a listed terrorist organization. Its history of brutality, repression and violence against innocent civilians cannot be overlooked or forgiven. To legitimize or normalize its control would be a betrayal of our commitment to upholding universal human rights and would send a dangerous message to oppressive regimes worldwide.

● (1725)

It is imperative that the international community stand in solidarity against the Taliban's oppressive regime. We must use all diplomatic, economic and humanitarian means at our disposal to support the people of Afghanistan, especially women, minorities and those who have risked their lives for the cause of peace and stability. We must continue to pressure the Taliban to respect human rights, uphold the rule of law and engage in meaningful dialogue to achieve a peaceful and inclusive Afghanistan.

The persecution of the Hazara community in Afghanistan is a tragic and ongoing chapter in the country's tumultuous history. The Hazaras, an ethnic minority, have faced relentless discrimination, violence and persecution for decades. Their distinct features and Shia Muslim beliefs have made them a target for extremist groups like the Taliban. Tragically, the Hazara community has borne the brunt of targeted attacks, including bombings, abductions and massacres. These atrocities have claimed countless innocent lives, causing immeasurable suffering and fear among the Hazara population. Despite their resilience and contributions to Afghan society, they continue to be marginalized and subjected to systemic discrimination. Their plight demands urgent attention from the international community to safeguard their rights, ensure their protection and hold perpetrators of violence against the Hazaras accountable. Upholding the dignity and safety of the Hazara community is not just an Afghan issue but a universal call for justice and human rights for all vulnerable minorities.

The Hazara-Canadian community has highlighted ongoing persecution and violent attacks by the Taliban, ISKP and local groups in Afghanistan. Between 2016 and mid-2021, there were 12 major attacks resulting in 1,868 victims. Since the Taliban takeover, there have been 19 major attacks leading to 1,225 victims. Religious sites, public transport, educational centres and sports clubs belonging to the Hazara community have been targeted. Indiscriminate attacks have caused a climate of fear and insecurity, with zero investigation and no accountability. Over 100 individuals, including women and girls, have been the victims of targeted assassinations. Taliban courts have ruled directing Hazara community members to relinquish lands and properties. Hence, the Hazara community is displaced, dispossessed and impoverished from its ancestral lands.

Hazaras are purged and excluded from all sorts of business and market structures. There has been a systematic ousting of Hazaras from government roles at provincial levels. Hazara judges, prosecutors and civil servants have been removed from key positions. Hazara representation in local governance leadership plummeted from 68% to near zero.

Under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the status of girls and women has drastically regressed, plunging into a state of profound oppression and limitation of basic rights. The progress achieved over the years in terms of education, work opportunities and societal participation has been forcefully reversed. Girls' education, once a beacon of hope and progress, has been severely curtailed. Most girls are now barred from attending school beyond a certain age, denying them the chance to pursue knowledge and fulfill their potential. Women's access to work and public life has been dramatically restricted, with severe limitations on employment, movement and engagement in society.

● (1730)

Their voices, once gaining traction, have been stifled as they face extreme constraints on their freedom of expression and participation. The Taliban's interpretation of sharia law has imposed a regressive and patriarchal system that confines women and girls to traditional roles, stripping them of autonomy and agency.

It is imperative to shed light on these violations of human rights, and advocate for the restoration of fundamental freedoms and opportunities for Afghan women and girls. Their plight calls for global attention and concerted efforts to ensure their rights and dignity are reinstated.

Routine Proceedings

The international community must rally together to safeguard the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. This involves prioritizing humanitarian aid to ensure access to education, health care and protection services. Diplomatic pressure should be exerted to hold the Taliban accountable for upholding women's rights, demanding their inclusion in decision-making processes. Collaborative efforts with local organizations and activists are vital to provide support and amplify voices advocating for gender equality. Additionally, offering asylum and resettlement opportunities for at-risk women and girls is crucial, ensuring their safety and a chance for a life free from oppression.

Delegitimizing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan necessitates diplomatic isolation, refusing recognition and imposing targeted sanctions. Highlighting their human rights abuses globally and supporting grassroots movements amplifies opposition. Providing aid directly to Afghan communities, bypassing Taliban control, demonstrates solidarity while discrediting their governance.

Empowering Afghan voices through international platforms and fostering alliances with regional neighbours to collectively condemn Taliban actions are crucial steps. By emphasizing the disparity between their promises and their oppressive reality, the international community can erode the legitimacy of the Taliban regime.

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in history, witnessing a transformation in the geopolitical landscape, a shift towards a multipolar world where the global south is emerging as a significant force, altering the dynamics of global power. This evolution has profound implications for international relations, with Afghanistan standing as a pertinent example within this shifting paradigm.

The traditional power structures that once defined the global order are undergoing a seismic shift. The dominance of western powers, particularly in shaping economic, political and security narratives, is being challenged. Countries across the global south are rising as influential actors, contributing to a more balanced and multipolar world.

The rise of the global south is driven by several factors. Economic growth and technological advancements in nations such as China, India, Brazil and others have significantly contributed to their increasing influence on the global stage. Moreover, collective efforts within the global south to strengthen regional co-operation and assert their interests in international forums have bolstered their presence in shaping global agendas.

Amidst this geopolitical transformation, Afghanistan holds a pivotal position. It has been a focal point of global attention due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Central Asia, the Middle East and South Asia. Afghanistan's historical significance as a battleground for competing interests, coupled with its natural resources, has made it a geopolitical chessboard for global powers.

The recent events in Afghanistan, especially the withdrawal of western forces and the subsequent Taliban takeover, have added a new dimension to this shifting geopolitical landscape. The situation in Afghanistan serves as a microcosm of evolving power dynamics, showcasing the complexities and challenges of multipolarity.

• (1735)

The Taliban's resurgence and assumption of power have raised concerns globally, not only about the rights and well-being of the Afghan people but also about regional stability. The manner in which the international community engages with the Taliban and addresses Afghanistan's future will significantly impact the trajectory of this multipolar world. Moreover, Afghanistan's place in this evolving geopolitical order brings to the forefront the role of regional actors. Countries in the vicinity, including Pakistan, Iran, China and Russia, have vested interests in Afghanistan's stability and security. Their engagement and co-operation in shaping Afghanistan's future will influence the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region and beyond.

The Global South's assertiveness in shaping global narratives demands a more inclusive and diversified approach to international relations. It calls for recognizing the voices and interests of diverse nations, prioritizing co-operation over unilateralism and fostering mutual understanding and respect among nations with varying cultural, political and economic backgrounds.

In conclusion, the evolving geopolitical situation leading to a multipolar world is a reality that requires thoughtful consideration and strategic engagement. Afghanistan's position in this global transformation highlights the complexities and challenges inherent in this shift. As we navigate this new era, it is imperative for the international community to embrace diversity, foster inclusive dialogue and work collaboratively to address global challenges while respecting the sovereignty and aspirations of all nations.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's bringing up the changing dynamics. We saw that first-hand in Afghanistan with the west's pulling out. I would like to ask the member the same question I asked the parliamentary secretary, and it is really a favour: to use his voice with the Liberal government, as a member of that party, to get some clarity around the current programs that exist for helping those Afghans who helped us. They put a cap on the number, as a quota, versus really focusing on the number. I am getting reports back from all sorts of NGOs, charities and organizations that have been working, saying that there are literally thousands of applicants who are stuck in the system in limbo. They do not know whether they are going to get here to Canada.

Can the member lend his voice to try to get some clarity, so that the Canadian public, the charities, the NGOs and members of Parliament all know exactly what is going on with the Afghan SIM program?

Routine Proceedings

• (1740)

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, we have delivered what we initially promised to the people of Afghanistan. However, more needs to be done. We have done it for the people of Ukraine. We are doing it for oppressed people and people in very tense situations in different parts of the world; we will continue doing so. Canada has a great record of being one of the countries with the highest per capita acceptance of refugees from across the world. We are proud of that, and we will continue in the same vein.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was refreshing, after some of the earlier speeches, to actually get back to a discussion of Afghanistan. I thank the member for that.

I want to ask specifically about the view of the government as it relates to engagement with opposition groups. It is my view and our view that engaging and working with the anti-Taliban, pro-democracy opposition groups is very important and something the government should be doing more of. Is the member aware of whether that engagement is happening right now under his government? Does he believe, as we do, that more engagement should be taking place?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that Canada engage with opposition groups, and not only political opposition groups but also humanitarian groups, various ethnic community groups and the various groups that represent the oppressed people in Afghanistan. It should do so in the same way it engages with groups, say, in Myanmar and other parts of the world. It is also very important that we engage with other international partners, because Canada alone cannot make a major difference in Afghanistan. However, working collaboratively with like-minded countries, especially countries in western democracies, and taking a joint, organized approach in dealing with the Taliban and the issues faced by lots of people in Afghanistan, women and girls particularly, will yield a better result.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment on the question that I think perplexes many of us, which is this: Why, having debated this concurrence motion in June, do we have it back before the House again today? Does he know of any situation in Afghanistan that has changed significantly or of any reason we would be debating this for a second time when apparently everyone in the House agrees on this motion?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I see no reason for this to have been brought up for discussion. I came to the House prepared to debate Bill C-56. I have my own views on the competition clause in that particular bill. I had certain suggestions to make for the bill, such as how to improve competition while not allowing 100% foreign ownership in the Canadian banking sector, as well as how we can use the regulatory tools that are available to give credit guidance to the bank to increase competition within the banking sector. This would lead to economic advancement and economic prosperity, for the growth of the manufacturing sector in Canada.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask the member the same question I asked the NDP member earlier today.

Given the crisis that happened in Afghanistan and the necessity of actually delivering some diplomatic services to get some of our

allies back here in the summer of 2021, does the member think it was a wise move for the government to ignore all that complexity and that emergency to call an opportunistic election at that point in time, which was not necessary and cost the Canadian population over \$600 million? Does he think that was a good diversion of resources by the government from an international emergency to a national opportunity to continue this minority government?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I think it was the right call by the government at that time. We delivered what was required, what we could do, to the best of our efforts. Jointly, along with other friendly countries, we did what we could for the Afghan people during that stage.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I asked myself the same question as my NDP colleague. Why are we debating this motion today? Why not sooner? There seems to be unanimous consent, but I will not repeat the same questions.

I have some concerns because when we talk about the Taliban, we know that it is already a listed terrorist organization. There is a great deal of distrust—in Quebec in any case, and I am sure it is the same across Canada—for this organization or this group of people who do not show much interest in human rights, especially when we talk about women's rights. This concerns us a lot. We saw here in Parliament that there have already been numerous debates over the years on the right to abortion. No one wants to reopen that debate, but there are times when some of our colleagues suggest that it could be up for debate in the future. That concerns us.

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that the situation in Canada, with this type of debate on upholding human rights, on a woman's right to an abortion and women's presence in society, could lead to extreme positions that, while not as serious as what we see in Afghanistan, could be similar to the types of speeches we might see there.

What are his thoughts on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I agree that, as the member said, the Taliban is a terrorist organization. We have to deal with it in the way we deal with all terrorist organizations. However, there is one small point that I did not mention in my speech and that I am concerned about. The western countries signed an agreement with the Taliban, knowing full well what it is. Now, they are forced to delegitimize it. I do not know how effective we can be when we handed them the power back.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to split my time with the member for Edmonton Manning.

I actually want to start my speech by answering the questions that NDP and Bloc members asked of the previous Liberal speaker: Why is it so important to debate this motion today? I have an article here from today's international news, titled "Female-Led Afghan Refugee Families Reluctant To Return To Afghanistan Amid Fresh UN Warning". Another article from last week was titled "How the Taliban Enables Violence Against Women".

As I mentioned in a previous intervention, there are a few key things coming up. It has been over a year since the all-party group formed to help former Afghan women MPs to get out of Afghanistan. I will get into that in a minute. There are huge concerns that I have been hearing from charities and NGOs that are continuing to try to help those Afghans fleeing the Taliban regime, in particular those who helped us. Finally, I want to get into the depth of just how terrible and oppressive the apartheid is against women and girls that is ongoing currently in Afghanistan. I think that makes it all relevant and, as was pointed out earlier, we are not slowing down government legislation or anything today, because it is time allocated. We will be voting on it soon enough.

Let us talk about the former Afghan women MPs. A group of us came together across all parties. There were a couple of Liberal MPs, myself from the Conservatives, somebody from the Bloc, the Greens and the NDP, all trying to work to get former Afghan women MPs safely out of Afghanistan. We started that group in October of last year, over a year ago. We did it behind the scenes. We did not go public. We really wanted to work with the government and the NGOs to get the help needed for these incredible women, who made a difference in Afghanistan before the Taliban took control again.

Unfortunately, what happened in January was the murder of Mursal Nabizada, which caused unbelievable grief for those of us tied to this behind the scenes. It was just terrible, because in two weeks, we can get somebody out of Afghanistan. It is not difficult to get somebody out of there if we have the political will. I am not going to elaborate in detail other than the bad news that we still do not have the vast majority of them out. I believe one of them has gotten to Canada, which is not even close. The good news is that there has been progress. The other part is that the government has been working with the group and with the NGOs, so we have been getting updates.

However, my biggest fear is that, if we lose another one of these former Afghan women MPs before they get safely to Canada, I am going to go from being one of the most non-partisan MPs in this chamber to quickly becoming one of the most partisan. It is unacceptable; this could have been solved in a matter of weeks, and it has been over a year now.

The other concern that I want to talk about is around the current support and the current programs that the government has for Afghans, in particular, the Canadian-Afghan special immigration program, which is apparently now closed. Right from day one, I raised concerns around this program that it was being focused on a quota rather than those most in need. I think 40,000 is the number

that the government chose. Another big concern is that a lot of Afghans successfully fled Afghanistan for neighbouring countries, but they did not necessarily have that connection to Canada. However, there are tons of former Canadian contractors, Canadian cultural advisers and Canadian interpreters of Afghan background who were working for us. Many of them are still stuck there to this day.

I am not going to go into long details. I know other members asked questions during this debate about the failure of the Liberal government when Kabul, Afghanistan, fell. They talked about how we could have done a heck of a lot more to get Afghans to safety at that time. I am on the record talking at length about that, so I am not going to go into detail.

• (1750)

I do want to focus on getting some clarity. This is the question that I asked the parliamentary secretary and one of the other Liberal members. I am asking for help. All I am asking the Liberal government to do is come out publicly with some clarity around the program and tell us if all the Afghans' applications that are currently in the SIM program are going to get processed so they eventually get to Canada.

I am hearing lots of rumours from NGOs and from groups working behind the scenes in collaboration with the government to get these Afghans to safety that there are still thousands, and I am not talking one thousand but thousands, plural, of Afghan applicants who have not even received an invitation to apply through the program, despite having applied over two years ago. I am trying to get to the point here that we need greater clarity on this. There are a lot of Afghans and Canadian Afghans with family members who are stuck in this process, and we have concerns.

In the next part of my speech, I am going to paraphrase pretty extensively from a report that has been out in the media in the last week, so all Canadians can understand how the Taliban is enabling violence against women.

We just finished, this past week, the 16 days of activism to end gender-based violence. However, in the 28 months since the Taliban basically took control, it completely dismantled Afghan women and girls' rights. It has imposed draconian restrictions regarding their education, employment and freedom of movement, and any perceived violation of these oppressive policies is often met with harassment, intimidation, and verbal and physical abuse, all orchestrated by the Taliban's ministry of vice and virtue. When women are detained by the authorities, they have been subject to cruel treatment, including torture.

Routine Proceedings

The Taliban's anti-women policies, combined with its patriarchal system, have made Afghanistan the lowest-ranked country in the 2023 women, peace and security index. They have basically rolled back over two decades' worth of gains that I and others helped try to establish in Afghanistan. The women there had achieved much in politics, governance, education, health and even the private sector.

However, within months of the Taliban taking over, it suspended the Afghan Constitution, which obligated the government to protect and promote human rights. It replaced the Ministry of Women's Affairs with the Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. It ordered professional and working women to stay home until further notice. It prevented women from travelling any long distances on road trips without a male supervisor, and it imposed a strict dress code on women.

As I have mentioned before in this chamber, I still have hope that those Afghans who did get a glimpse of what the future could hold will eventually be back to lead Afghanistan and be a beacon of hope, change and leadership. However, that is going to be achieved only if western democracies and countries like Canada continue to provide the necessary support and allow them to get out of there in the first place.

I actually believe this debate is very timely and important today. The Liberal government must continue to provide support and provide clarity to all those Afghans still stuck in Afghanistan who helped us or are fleeing persecution, and provide clarity to the many charities and NGOs working to get these Afghans to safety. This is especially important when it comes to the former Afghan women MPs and their families. I also want to make it crystal clear that the Taliban are terrorists. They must remain listed as such. They are some of the most oppressive, terrible people in the world, and I have zero sympathy.

Afghanistan will someday in the future return to being a democracy that will respect human rights, but only if we continue to help those who will eventually return and lead this necessary change.

• (1755)

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to correct the record and inform the House that the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1861, 1863, 1864, 1867 to 1869, 1879, 1884, 1886, 1891, 1892, 1896, 1901, 1903, 1905, 1909, 1915, 1919, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1933, 1936 to 1938, 1942, 1862, 1865, 1866, 1870 to 1878, 1880 to 1883, 1885, 1887 to 1890, 1893 to 1895, 1897 to 1900, 1902, 1904, 1906 to 1908, 1910 to 1914, 1916 to 1918, 1920, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1928 to 1932, 1934, 1935, 1939, 1940 and 1941.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his remarks focusing on those we left behind in Afghanistan. I have a bit of a story. I worked in Afghanistan just before the total Taliban takeover. One day I got up in the morning and was given a message from my hotel box, which said, "If you're still in town tomorrow, we will kill your translator and your driver." The translator and the driver said not to pay any attention to it, but I said, "We're

actually leaving, because I get to leave this situation and you have to stay here."

The threat against those who work for international organizations and those who work for other nations, like Canada, is very real and very serious. I share the member's concerns about our failures to support those people.

• (1800)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his commitment to trying to help make a difference in the world. There are so many countries Canada could help. The government of the day, way back when, chose to get us involved in Afghanistan.

The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan talked about the challenges around fatigue, and that is the biggest challenge I always had in talking to Canadians about why we are there. At the time, I was a soldier. Soldiers go where they are told to go and serve whatever political stripe of government is in power here in Canada.

However, Canada can help. I believed in that mission, and I think my speech highlighted that. However, one of the concerns I had, which I tried to explain as I moved up the ranks, was that Canada needs to understand that when we commit ourselves to these international missions to try to make peace and security in other countries, this is not a world war where we are fighting a uniformed combatant or enemy. This is stuff where we are trying to promote democracy. That takes a generation.

Unfortunately, the west sometimes does not understand this and does not have the political will to support things for the two or three decades it takes to provide this necessary support. That is why it is important that we work together as coalitions of the willing or in international organizations like NATO or the UN.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about whether to keep the Taliban on the list of terrorist organizations. I think it is important to do so, but are there other things we can do?

How can we at least best protect ourselves against democratic backsliding toward extremism, which we deplore and which is so upsetting? I am thinking in particular of certain events that have taken place across Canada in recent years, events that we would never have thought possible and never wanted to see.

Besides keeping the Taliban on the list of terrorist organizations, what does my colleague think we can do to protect ourselves against a shift toward extremism like the one proposed by the Taliban?

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, first, as I said, we have to get those who helped us and those leaders, the former Afghan women MPs I talked about, to safety. They are the ones who will eventually go back to Afghanistan, not all of them but some of them, someday, or maybe even their kids, depending on how long this takes, to actually lead that change. That is number one: We have to get out the people who are those leaders of change within Afghanistan.

Second, which was talked about in certain speeches, is supporting those opposition groups. This is where it gets tricky for the west. We like to believe that our standards and our rigid code around human rights and everything, the way we expect people in this country to behave, would apply uniformly across the globe. They do not. Some of the groups that we may want to help are not necessarily going to play by that rule book all the time. It sometimes becomes a tricky situation of trying to pick and support those groups that are less bad. That is where it gets tricky.

That is what we need to do. I am a big believer that in certain things, with the Taliban in particular, where we in the west kind of messed up when I look at it over 20 years, maybe we should have drawn more lines in the sand with respect to the Taliban, or not the Taliban but the Afghan government at the time, telling them not to cross the line, that there are certain expectations and that if they cross a certain line, that is when NATO and the international community will step in and make a difference.

I think that whatever opposition groups we could provide support to, to try to get that change, we need to do that in order to get the Taliban out.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was here when we voted for Operation Enduring Freedom. The understanding was that we were going to put our young people in harm's way to build a democracy. Many really fine people from my region went and put their lives on the line.

There was an understanding that that commitment was going to be followed through, to our soldiers, to the NGOs and to the people of Afghanistan. We can look at what ended up happening. The Americans pulled out. The Brits are deporting people who kept them alive in the field. Canada left so many people who were on the front lines, left them there.

I want to ask my hon. colleague, because of his military experience, what does that say to the next country to which we say, "We will be there for you", when we left so many people behind? I know we worked, in my office, for midwives to get out. We worked to get interpreters out. They were failed, right across the board, by NATO and the west. How do we then go to the next country and say, "We have your back"?

• (1805)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. I have brought this up in the chamber before during debate on this specific issue.

That is the risk we are putting out there. It does not matter if we end up in a country in Africa, or we end up in a country somewhere in the Middle East again in the future. Whether it is our military, our diplomats or Canadian NGOs that depend upon getting the nec-

essary quality cultural advisers, interpreters and people to help us to even buy the local groceries and sustenance needed to actually function in those countries, they are going to look at us and say, "We are not going with Canada. We are not going to help them out." We are now putting our reputation at risk, that when things go sideways, we will leave them behind and not help them out. It is so important, not only to our Canadian reputation but just to do the right thing.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we are all well aware, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is catastrophic. Millions of people face major challenges due to decades of conflict, political instability and, in the past few years, the resurgence of the Taliban.

Canada took part in an international coalition to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban, a campaign that saw more than 40,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces serve in that country. As such, 158 lost their lives and more than 2,000 were injured. For the families of those men and women still dealing with the after-effects of the long period of conflict, the seizing of the country once more by the Taliban in 2021 was saddening. It seems like their sacrifices had been in vain.

The Taliban was, for good reason, listed by Canada as a terrorist group in 2013. Its rule is marked by limited rights for women and minorities, and a history of human rights abuses. The Taliban's return to power triggered a mass exodus of Afghans inside and outside the country, sparking a refugee crisis. Many had to flee for fear of reprisals, persecution and restrictions on individual freedoms. The Liberal government made a lot of promises, especially to aid those Afghans who had worked with Canadian troops during our combat mission there, but, sadly, many of those promises turned out to be words and not actions.

It is not only those who worked with Canada's military who have suffered as a result of Canada's response to the latest takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Internally displaced persons are also in urgent need of help. They lack access to basic needs such as food, clean water, health care and education. I am pleased that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has seen fit to firmly denounce the Taliban and reject any recognition or legitimization of its control over Afghan territory. A terrorist organization that achieves by force what it cannot achieve at the ballot box is not a legitimate government.

Routine Proceedings

It makes sense for the committee to denounce the Taliban system of gender discrimination, systemic violence targeting minority communities, reprisals against former members of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces, attacks on freedom of the press and other violations of fundamental human rights. The more than two years since the Taliban seized power have been two years of broken promises. In 2021 a Taliban spokesman promised that his government was going to allow women to work and study, and that women would be very active in society. The reality is that not only were women banned from attending university, education for girls is banned beyond the sixth grade. The Taliban has also banned women from working in all non-governmental organizations. According to the International Labour Organization, women's participation in the labour force dropped by 25 per cent between August 2021 and March 2023.

Conservatives have long been calling for action to hold those in power in Afghanistan accountable for their actions against the Afghan populace, the international community and, most importantly, Afghan women and children.

The Taliban have neglected the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, leaving the population suffering from a malnutrition crisis and a rapid increase in acute hunger. The number of people suffering has increased exponentially, from 14 million in 2021 to approximately 20 million this year.

From 2001 to 2014, our Canadian troops heard first-hand the stories from Afghan citizens of repression under the Taliban. Our troops fought, not only for Canada but also for the good, innocent people they grew to love in their time there. Canadian troops put their lives on the line, not only for their country but to help Afghan women and children have hope of a better life. Years of conflict and violence led to a humanitarian crisis that shattered the innocence of these people. Life under the Taliban is so much worse than before.

● (1810)

We owe it to our veterans and our fallen soldiers to continue the effort towards a better humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. That means not even considering that Taliban rule, by force and fear, is somehow legitimate. To consider recognizing the Taliban government, as some have suggested, would be wrong. It would be rewarding an organization that knows nothing but force and fear and rejects the values Canadians hold in common. To recognize what the Taliban calls a government would be to reward the actions of a terrorist group. Conservatives believe Canada must continue to stand with the Afghan people, oppose the Taliban and engage with civil society and pro-democracy groups who want to restore Afghan freedom and democracy.

I have at times wondered if the Liberal commitment to freedom and human rights is as strong as the Conservative one. As Kabul was falling to the Taliban, the Liberal Prime Minister responded immediately by calling an election. While the Americans were airlifting more than 100,000 desperate people out of Kabul, the Canadian Prime Minister decided to call an unnecessary election instead of providing the leadership Canadians expected and Afghans hoped for.

The Prime Minister promised to provide a safe haven for 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan. When Canadians heard that promise,

they did not dream that it would take more than two years for him to keep that promise. One would think that, faced with a humanitarian crisis, the resettlement process would have been a priority for the government. One would think that, but the Liberals did not. At least Canadians hope they can fulfill the promise by the end of this year.

No wonder so many Afghans felt let down by Canada as the Taliban seized power and began persecuting those they saw as opponents. In Afghanistan's time of need, the Liberals decided to have an election. It seems like ever since, they have fallen further and further behind in their promise to the humanitarian crisis, both in Afghanistan and in the surrounding countries from which refugees have fled. It is a sorry track record, one they hope Canadians will not notice.

Having failed the people of Afghanistan in so many ways, it is important that, at the very least, Canada continues to stand up for the values that we share. Those include religious freedom and gender equality, two things the Taliban denies to those under its rule. More than just denying rights, the Taliban looks to export its agenda as it continues to coordinate and facilitate attacks with other terrorist groups such as al Qaeda, the IRGC and ISIS.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights believes that the Taliban must remain a listed terrorist organization. I think all hon. members will agree.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

● (1815)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, without the fanfare to which we have normally become accustomed, at this point I would simply request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division stands deferred until Tuesday, December 12, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 23, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1900)

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

(Division No. 606)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Aldag
Alghabra	Ali
Allison	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Atwin
Badawey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bezan	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney	Block
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Bragdon	Brassard
Brière	Brock
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins
Cannings	Caputo
Carr	Carrie
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Chahal
Chambers	Champagne
Champoux	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Chong	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Collins (Victoria)	Cooper
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davidson	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
Desbiens	Desilets

Government Orders

Desjarlais	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Doherty	Dong
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Dzerowicz
El-Khoury	Ellis
Epp	Erskine-Smith
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Ferreri
Fillmore	Findlay
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Freeland	Fry
Gaheer	Gainey
Gallant	Garon
Garrison	Gaudreau
Gazan	Généreux
Genuis	Gerretsen
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gould	Gourde
Gray	Green
Hajdu	Hallan
Hanley	Hardie
Hepfner	Hoback
Hughes	Hutchings
Iacono	Idlout
Jen	Jaczek
Jeneroux	Johns
Joly	Jones
Jowhari	Julian
Kayabaga	Kelloway
Kelly	Khalid
Khanna	Khera
Kitchen	Kmiec
Koutrakis	Kram
Kramp-Neuman	Kurek
Kusie	Kusmierczyk
Kwan	Lake
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lantsman
Lapointe	Larouche
Lattanzio	Lauzon
Lawrence	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lehoux
Lemire	Leslie
Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Liepert	Lightbound
Lloyd	Lobb
Long	Longfield
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Majumdar	Maloney
Martel	Martinez Ferrada
Masse	Mathysen
May (Cambridge)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McDonald (Avalon)
McGuinty	McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLean
McLeod	McPherson
Melillo	Mendès
Mendicino	Miao
Miller	Moore
Morantz	Morrice
Morrison	Morrissey
Motz	Murray
Muys	Naqvi
Nater	Noormohamed
Normandin	O'Connell

Government Orders

Oliphant	O'Regan
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Perkins
Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Plamondon	Poilievre
Powlowski	Qualtrough
Redekopp	Rempel Garner
Richards	Roberts
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Rood	Rota
Ruff	Sahota
Sajjan	Saks
Samson	Savard-Tremblay
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schiefke	Schmale
Seeback	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Shields
Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	Singh
Small	Sorbara
Soroka	Sousa
Steinley	Ste-Marie
Stewart	St-Onge
Strahl	Stubbs
Sudds	Tassi
Taylor Roy	Thériault
Therrien	Thomas
Thompson	Tochor
Tolmie	Trudeau
Turnbull	Uppal
Valdez	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Van Popta
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vecchio	Vidal
Vien	Viersen
Vignola	Villemure
Virani	Vis
Vuong	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Weiler
Wilkinson	Williams
Williamson	Yip
Zahid	Zarrillo
Zimmer — 315	

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Michaud — 4**The Deputy Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, December 7, the House shall now resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 32 under Government Business.

* * *

[Translation]

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 32, Mr. Chris d'Entremont in the chair)

The Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members how the proceedings will unfold.

[English]

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments.

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, December 7, members may divide their time with another member. The time provided for the debate may be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 12 periods of 20 minutes each. The Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

[Translation]

We will now begin the take-note debate.

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this committee take note of Indigenous services.

[English]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I would also like to preface my comments this evening by reminding colleagues in the House that we are not just talking about numbers or policies here. We are talking about people, communities, families and children, and what we do in this House really matters.

It was my great honour to be here today as the Minister of Indigenous Services introduced Bill C-61, an act respecting water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure on first nation lands.

We do not always have good days in this House, but today was a good day. First nations have long called for legislation that affirms their inherent rights, recognizes their stewardship in keeping water clean and meets first nations' needs. Today, we collectively leapt closer to making access and security to safe and clean drinking water a reality.

Before I came to the House, and I have spoken many times about my role in education, I was a teacher. I think about my time at Fredericton High School in particular. I used to teach my students about the ongoing water crisis here in Canada and what our nation was and was not doing to address it. I often pointed to the example of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation in Winnipeg. At the time, it was under 18 years of a long-term boil water advisory. Community members had to bring in large jugs. They could not brush their teeth, cook or bathe in the water. Then we built the human rights museum, and they could see this museum from their community. I always thought, "Whose human rights are we fighting for in this country?" I am so proud to say that Shoal Lake 40 First Nation has come off the long-term boil water advisory list.

Government Orders

Everyone in Canada should have access to safe and clean drinking water. This simple and seemingly uncontroversial reality has been denied to first nations communities for centuries. It was only through the tireless advocacy of first nations partners and allies that this reality can come to be. This day belongs to them.

Clean, safe and reliable drinking water, as well as an environment that helps sustain this reality, as first nations have enjoyed and protected from time immemorial, requires effective legislative tools. It is critical that we have effective legislation, a national regulatory regime and first nations-led institutions, so we can support sustainable access to clean, safe and reliable drinking water in first nations communities in perpetuity. That is why we introduced Bill C-61 today, which is a key commitment to establishing new proposed safe drinking water and waste water legislation in consultation with first nations. I really want to highlight that last piece; consultation is critical.

The proposed legislation is aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It was developed through engagement that put first nations' voices at the forefront. Our government worked directly with first nations rights holders, including modern treaty and self-governing first nations, through their own representative institutions, and first nations organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations and the first nations advisory committee on safe drinking water, to help ensure that the bill is responsive to first nations' needs and priorities.

I want to thank everyone who has been a part of this process and helped strengthen this bill. Engagement leading to this bill began in 2018. Consultation drafts were posted online in the spirit of partnership, and we have encouraged feedback from as many first nations as possible. This consultation process is ongoing, and I think that is important. We want to hear from all voices across this country, and we hope that everyone will have the chance to be heard. This is what partnership looks like. Hand in hand, we will continue to grow and learn from each other, and we can certainly improve and do better at every turn.

The days of paternalistic, one-sided and ineffective policy that ignores indigenous voices are gone, and we must ensure that they stay gone. The result is new proposed legislation that would affirm the inherent right of first nations to self-government. Bill C-61 would ensure that first nations have the tools necessary to protect source water and maintain drinking water and waste water infrastructure in a self-determined way.

It is important to understand that this proposed legislation would hold the federal government accountable for investing in water infrastructure. It would also lead to the application of minimum standards for clean drinking water in every first nation across the country. It would lay the groundwork for the creation of a first nation-led water institution to support communities.

Specifically, the bill would achieve a few things. It would require the Minister of Indigenous Services to make best efforts, in consultation and co-operation with first nations, to provide access to safe drinking water on first nations lands. It would strengthen funding commitments through best efforts to provide adequate and sustainable funding for water services on first nation lands, equitable to the services received in non-first nation communities. It would re-

quire that funding, at a minimum, meets the commitment of expenditures set out in the 2021 safe drinking water for first nations class action settlement agreement and establish minimum national standards for drinking water and waste water on first nations lands based on first nations' choice.

• (1905)

It would facilitate water agreements, including transboundary source water protection agreements, which should involve first nations, Canada and provincial and territorial governments, as well as bilateral financial agreements between first nations and Canada to support the exercise of first nations jurisdiction.

It would commit to supporting the establishment of a first nations water commission to assist first nations in exercising greater control over their drinking water and waste-water services, as well as the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including through consultation and co-operation on federal regulatory and funding allocation decisions.

To those listening at home, this is huge. It is incredibly transformative, and I really cannot underscore that enough.

I want to be clear: The government's commitment to sustainable access to safe and clean drinking water on first nations communities does not end with the introduction of this bill. We will continue to work with first nations rights holders and organizations to ensure access to safe drinking water, now and for future generations, so that no one else has to grow up without being able to brush their teeth, bathe at home or cook their food in the water that surrounds their community.

I would also like to acknowledge the Auditor General's third report, titled "Access to Safe Drinking Water in First Nations Communities". This report provided important recommendations for us to consider, and I want to thank the Auditor General once again for her work.

We are working hard to do better for first nations communities. Previous governments of all stripes could not say this. It is the reason I ran to be involved in federal politics: I needed to see a change. The government has made historic investments to help first nations communities meet their needs. I am proud of this work, of this team and of our commitment to keep going. Recognizing that it is not a perfect path forward, we are committed to doing it in partnership with indigenous communities and leadership.

Government Orders

When it comes to water and waste water, as of September 30, more than \$3.6 billion of targeted funding has been invested to support 1,244 water and waste-water projects. Of these, 547 are now complete, while 697 are ongoing. These projects will serve 471,000 people in 591 first nations communities.

We know these investments must continue. The fall economic statement announced in November included a renewal of \$1.55 billion from 2024-25 to 2025-26 to support clean drinking water for first nations. This funding will ensure that water and waste-water projects continue without interruption.

We heard from first nations leaders. They need strong, ambitious, sustainable and predictable investments. That is what is required, and that is what is being delivered. These investments are directly improving the everyday lives of first nations communities. We are making progress every day, and it is important to acknowledge these efforts while also acknowledging the need to go farther.

Since 2015, first nations, with support from Indigenous Services Canada, have lifted 143 long-term drinking water advisories; 267 short-term drinking water advisories have been prevented from becoming long term. Comprehensive action plans are in place in 26 communities to resolve the 28 active long-term advisories. One long-term boil water advisory is one too many. We have a team on each project working at pace and in partnership with communities. This country will no longer dictate terms to first nations on how to achieve their goals; instead, we are extending a hand and letting the leadership shine and carry these remaining communities forward.

We understand that many of these projects come with complex challenges, such as procuring resources, especially in remote communities, and extreme weather conditions that continue to affect infrastructure projects across the country. The solutions to address the lack of access to safe drinking water are unique to each first nation community. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Plans have been developed for each community, and we are currently working with them at different stages of these plans to improve infrastructure and operations.

Ultimately, we understand and acknowledge that there is no one solution to this complex issue, but despite the complexity, there are many examples of positive results and innovation being led by first nations. I think we need a bit of hope at this time. Through my visits to communities, I have been fortunate to see some of these results and to meet with many leaders about the important work they are doing and the ways we can support them.

For example, this June, Northwest Angle No. 33 in Ontario lifted three long-term drinking water advisories by leading the construction of a new centralized water treatment plant, replacing the outdated pump houses.

Another example is the Okanagan Indian Band, where community leaders used an integrated project delivery approach to harness the talents of all participants and ensure accountability in environmental stewardship. The result was improved access to clean water and faster project delivery.

One of the most critical areas of our work is to define a new approach to how the department funds on-reserve infrastructure and to return decision-making to where it belongs: with first nations

communities. Over the next year, Indigenous Services Canada will continue to work on this important issue with first nations communities and organizations, other government departments and financial institutions.

Above all, we are focused on service transfer in partnership with indigenous peoples. Service transfer is the basis of our work on access to safe drinking water, and it is critical to supporting indigenous self-determination.

• (1910)

We share the goal of supporting sustainable first nations-led approaches to ensure that on-reserve water systems are safe. It is critical that first nations communities have the tools to decide for themselves, and I am honoured to work alongside them as we do this work for the next generations.

Woliwon.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, the parliamentary secretary and I work together on the INAN committee and have had a good history of working together.

The parliamentary secretary spent much of her time tonight talking about the water legislation, and I get that it is an exciting announcement for the government, but with the introduction of this legislation there has been a lot of talk about co-development, the idea of engaging with first nations across the country. To be honest, in my engagement with people last week who were in Ottawa for the Assembly of First Nations, all of the people I talked to say they are not sure who this co-development was with because it was not with their communities.

Today, the FSIN, which represents 74 first nations in Saskatchewan, said the bill completely misses the mark. Chief Bobby Cameron said in a release, “As it stands, the federal water act announced today is not true reconciliation, it is an attempt to legalize the status quo.”

I would ask the parliamentary secretary to explain to us who exactly the co-development was with, who they talked to, which first nations across the country they communicated and engaged with on the development of this legislation, because nobody I have talked to was part of that process. If she could answer that, I would appreciate it.

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned, consultation is critical. We are really trying to redesign this approach and make sure we are moving forward hand in hand in partnership.

I know that it is five years since the consultation process began in 2018. Draft legislation was shared with every first nations community in this country at least twice. We heard from indigenous partners. At the announcement this morning, they were able to share some of that process and the idea of getting as close to co-development as we can get. It is a process we need to ensure moves forward in other departments as well. I would like to see it improved.

It is also important that any voices who have concerns know that the process is still continuing. We still have the committee process and debate in this House. We want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to be part of this and be proud of what we are moving forward with. I would challenge the idea that it is the status quo. I really think this is transformative. It is changing lives and we will see this, hopefully, in perpetuity because this legislation really enshrines it to ensure that it continues regardless of what government is in power.

Consultation is key, and I appreciate the member highlighting that.

● (1915)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Chair, specific to the member's statement about the water legislation, it is clear from speaking with members of Treaty Nos. 6, 7 and 8 across the Prairies and, in particular, in my home province of Alberta, that they are concerned about the consultation process. The government has a very important principle that it must honour, which is the honour of the Crown. It is to do things to better the relationship with the nations with which they have signed treaties. Those same nations are today saying that they have not been spoken to. Four times Treaty Nos. 6, 7 and 8 reached out to the Minister of Indigenous Services and failed to get a response.

When will the minister take the rights of treaty people seriously and consult, with the true honour of the Crown? It must be acknowledged by these nations. The continued failure to do so is a failure on the part of Canada and on the part of the minister. What does the government have to say to treaty nations that feel right now that the government is taking steps to stomp on the rights of treaty people across our country? What will it do to ensure that the consultation process is more robust and clear, but, more importantly, respects their rights? To date, they are telling us it does not.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, I thoroughly respect my colleague. It is an important question for all of us to discuss in this House. What does true consultation look like? What does true partnership look like?

We know that every indigenous community in the country was given this draft legislation on two different occasions. I know it was first released in May. There was also the online consultation period. It is disheartening to hear that they had an issue communicating with the minister. I will certainly bring that back to the department and make sure we have open lines of communication. I am also happy, as the parliamentary secretary, to sit down with these communities and have these discussions. Ideally, this is supposed to be

done before we introduce legislation, so we really need to look at this process moving forward.

It is absolutely about respecting the treaties. This is one of the reasons I came to this House: to ensure the treaties are recognized and upheld. I come from a peace and friendship territory on the east coast, which is unceded, unsurrendered territory, and this is what we talk about all the time. The number one thing we can do in this country to walk in reconciliation is uphold the treaties.

We did hear from Treaty No. 5 territory partners, who are happy with this. There are some issues as well about ensuring that all voices are heard. The Assembly of First Nations is largely supportive of this as well. The Atlantic First Nations Water Authority, which is first nations-led, from my neck of the woods is also very supportive and spoke at the press conference today.

It is important and we will receive the criticisms, but I am going to look forward in a really positive way because this is transformative and speaks to challenging the status quo. Every department can look into what they can do to better that consultation process.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to ask the government a bit of a broader question. The member spoke about including the voices of indigenous peoples, consultation, self-government, etc. However, I note that in many cases there is a tension between the government's stated goals with respect to climate policy and what individual indigenous nations may be asking for. There is a case now that has over 130 indigenous nations taking the government to court over its carbon tax policy. I have heard from indigenous communities, for instance in the north, that there was a complete lack of consultation before the government imposed development bans. We heard on a foreign affairs committee trip a number of years ago to the Northwest Territories that the consultation before imposing the development moratorium was a phone call 45 minutes before an announcement was made.

Therefore, it seems that the government has a bit of a problem in cases where indigenous peoples are calling for policies that contradict the government's stated goals when it comes to its so-called climate policy. In instances where there is a conflict, what should win out? Should it be the government's intentions with regard to a carbon tax or blocking development; or should it be the wishes of indigenous people?

Government Orders

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, it is important that all members of this House try not to use indigenous people as a pawn in their political games or their partisan ideology. What we are seeing playing out with this conversation right now is a misrepresentation of what is happening. Indigenous peoples are on the front line of what is happening with the climate crisis and they really want us to act. I know that, in most cases among the leadership I have spoken to, there is a consensus that pricing mechanisms can get us further on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and indigenous peoples want to be partners with that.

The conversation that is happening around Ontario chiefs is important. It is really about their wanting a more equitable stake in what is happening around our approach to the environment, so we are going to have that conversation. I really look forward to the judicial review and what comes out of that, but, again, it is important to deal in facts and it is really important to acknowledge that indigenous peoples are there with us, wanting to confront this climate crisis head-on.

• (1920)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, over the last 20 years, Indigenous Services Canada has cut tribal council funding in half. This is under both the Harper Conservative government and the current government. These severe cutbacks have had a huge impact on critical services to the nations in my riding. The Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council and AFN have been asking for increases in funding via motions, letters and meetings. They have been literally begging for the government to increase funding. This is impacting children, youth and elders in our communities.

When does Indigenous Services Canada intend to finally increase tribal council funding and bring it back to the level it was 20 years ago?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, we know we need stable, predictable, ongoing funding so that communities can provide the services that they need. We know that it affects children. We know that it affects operations. I know that, in general, Indigenous Services Canada's funding has increased by 156% since 2015. I would love to look specifically into this piece around the tribal council funding. Again, it is incumbent upon all of us. We have the 2024 budget ahead. I will need help in asking for this increase. It is going to take all of us to ensure that this is a priority for our government. I hear the member on this. I am also concerned. I would specifically, again, like to look into it and I will get back to the member with that information.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to direct the question to the parliamentary secretary related to how this work helps with reconciliation. Many Canadians follow the relationship between Canada and the indigenous peoples. We have disappointed this relationship time and time again, as the Crown. The residential school legacy that has generational impacts and the fact that many indigenous persons have not had adequate water for generations are inexcusable, but reconciliation has to start somewhere.

Could my colleague reflect on how this is one small step forward in the work that needs to happen? I have heard from first nations communities in particular that our government has done more than any government, probably since Confederation, in moving forward

reconciliation. How is this one more piece of that healing path that we need to be on as a Canadian society with the indigenous peoples in Canada?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Chair, I think about water in particular as being so critical to this conversation around reconciliation. It is about the environment. It is about stewardship but water is life. My stepfather is a Wolastoq Grand Council chief and his main priority is protecting the water and that is what I have been taught to do from a young age.

For me, this is huge. I had tears in my eyes this morning, in taking part in the press conference. I think we can all be proud of what was accomplished today.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, as I begin my comments tonight on the Department of Indigenous Services, I want to take a moment to congratulate the newly elected national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Cindy Woodhouse. Also, as an MP from Saskatchewan, I would like to congratulate David Pratt on running a great campaign and on a strong second-place finish.

Speaking of the AFN, last week, as chiefs from across the country gathered here in Ottawa, I had the opportunity to meet with many of these leaders. I always come away impressed with how the leadership is focused on finding ways to improve the lives of the people that they serve. More and more of these discussions revolve around trying to find ways to end the failing path that forces them to come to Ottawa to fight for programming dollars.

The waste of time, energy and resources for first nations leaders, who are put in a position to compete with other first nations to see who can best fill out forms or who can hire the right lobbyists or endlessly spend money on outside consultants to make sure applications are done just right for somebody sitting at a desk in Ottawa, needs to end.

It is time for first nations people to make their own decisions. What they need is less made-in-Ottawa, not more Ottawa.

Unfortunately, when looking at the indigenous services department, or ISC as I will refer to it, it is clear why major change is needed.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking specifically about the results of this department.

ISC sets targets under its four core responsibilities. In 2022-23, ISC sought to achieve 45 results. Progress toward meeting these results was measured using 83 separate indicators. A result status is assigned to each indicator based on the measured outcome, or the actual result.

Government Orders

Of the 83 indicators, only 14, or 17%, of them met their target; 19, or 23%, have no result available; and 37, or 45%, are to be achieved at some point in the future. To extend this out a little bit, over the last five years, there were 367 indicators and the results are actually very similar, as 17% met their target, 23% have no result available and 46% are to be achieved sometime in the future.

Additionally, there is this internal services component of the department, which, according to public accounts, increased from \$146 million in 2018 to \$296 million in 2023.

The solution now is to take a whole new approach and to implement a renewed departmental results framework for 2023-24. By the way, they did this for the 2019-20 year already. ISC will roll all four core responsibilities into one new core responsibility.

Remember, this is a department that claims that it plans to meet 45% of the targets it sets for itself sometime in the future. I guess that future will never come.

This department spends more time playing bureaucratic games by changing target-setting schemes than working on solving the actual challenges indigenous people face.

This is a department that has increased its planned spending from about \$9.3 billion in 2018-19 to \$39.6 billion in 2022-23, with the same projection for 2023-24. The actual authorities that were approved for 2022-23 were \$44.8 billion. Over the same period, it has increased the number of FTEs, or full-time equivalents, from 4,210 to 7,278. Those are significant increases.

I am not the only one who has raised these concerns. On February 1, 2022, at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, I moved a motion asking the Parliamentary Budget Officer to conduct a research and comparative analysis on the estimates of CIRNAC and ISC from the years 2015-16 to 2022-23.

On May 18, 2022, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released his report. Let me quote from the executive summary of that report:

Financial resources allocated to providing Indigenous services has increased significantly over this period. A quantitative and qualitative approach using publicly available data was employed to evaluate how effective the organizations providing these services were in using these resources.

The analysis conducted indicates that the increased spending did not result in a commensurate improvement in the ability of these organizations to achieve the goals that they had set for themselves. This was partly driven by the volatility in the departmental result indicators. Many were added or removed over the course of the period preventing results from being collected due to data collection lags. Some indicators lack target values and completion dates altogether. Based on the qualitative review the ability to achieve the targets specified has declined.

These are the words of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. They are not my words.

● (1925)

Mr. Ken Coates is a distinguished fellow and director of the indigenous affairs program at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. He is also the Canada research chair in regional innovation at the University of Saskatchewan. In August 2022, he wrote an article in response to the same PBO report that I referred to. Here is what he said:

Put bluntly, Canada is not getting what it is paying for—and what's worse, the massive spending is not improving lives in Indigenous communities....

If Canada spends billions on Indigenous affairs, it must mean that we care deeply about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

But it does nothing of the sort. While headlines emphasize dollar amounts, the statistics that tell the actual story of Indigenous well-being—around employment, health, housing conditions, suicide rates, violence and imprisonment, language, cultural revitalization—are much more sombre. When spending vast sums fails to make a substantial difference in many communities, the federal response is too often to double down and spend even more, in the absence of understanding what actually works to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples.

When Mr. Giroux, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, was at INAN to discuss his report, I asked him to comment on what Mr. Coates had said. I asked him whether these results were common to other departments or whether they were unique to CIRNAC and ISC. Mr. Giroux responded by saying:

In short, [I would say] based on the performance indicators that we have analyzed in our report last year, I would tend to agree with Mr. Coates. [That] seems to be consistent...whether it's common among departments, I would say...it's not common to see a level of increase of that magnitude that is not accompanied by a significant improvement in performance indicators.

Mr. Coates went on in his article to say something else: “The government can and does change up targets and metrics, making it difficult to determine actual outcomes. But given the vast expenditures, such a conclusion is tragic.” When I asked Mr. Giroux to comment on this, he said, “I agree with Mr. Coates that there seems to be an outcome problem.” I asked him further, “Do you think there's an accountability issue that's created by these moving, changing targets that aren't consistent?” He replied:

I agree with you.

I don't think it's done on purpose. I think public servants who come up with these indicators genuinely mean to have the best indicators. However, changing them regularly or frequently does not help for accountability and accountability purposes to track a departmental performance over time.

It is a department where, in 2021-2022, 94.6% of the employees, at executive level or above, received performance pay totalling almost \$3.3 million. Remember, it is a department that met 18% of its targets in that year. What is worse is that when I drilled a little deeper, I found that over the previous five years, 99.2% of executives at a level three or above received performance pay. This represents the top 33 people in the department in 2018-2019, and that number grew to 56 people by 2022-23.

Government Orders

I asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer about the performance pay system, in response to an answer I got on an Order Paper question. The Order Paper response reads, "Individual performance pay holds executives accountable for individual results and is not related to departmental results, which measure organizational goals." I asked Mr. Giroux whether he thought there was merit in tying performance pay to organizational achievement rather than just individual achievement. He replied:

I don't see how a majority of executives can have at-risk pay and performance pay if a department only meets half of its targets.

Is there merit...? I think there's more than merit. I think it would be common sense.

If I can be so blunt, it does not require a great deal of management expertise to conclude that the department of indigenous services is failing. Almost every conversation I have with indigenous leaders from across Canada involves commentary around the fact that they are utterly exhausted by the inadequacy and bureaucracy of the department. A leader of a national indigenous organization told me recently that ISC is a machine that eats money. If we want to move down a path of reconciliation, we must at least begin with the truth. I think, unfortunately, that is what the Prime Minister and government fail to admit. After eight years, the government has spent more money with fewer results. It has hired more people with fewer results. It has increased bonuses with fewer results. It has shuffled targets and target-setting procedures with, yes, fewer results. It is time to accept the truth: This is not working.

• (1930)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, the member started off by acknowledging the election process of the Assembly of First Nations. I want to congratulate the national chief, Cindy Woodhouse, who is someone I know. Throughout my friendship with her, she has always been a very powerful indigenous woman and a very strong advocate. I am sure she will do exceptionally well and make many contributions in the years ahead.

Even though the member has been somewhat cynical, what we have seen over the last number of years is numerous calls to action actually put into place, and many of them are actually a work in progress. I think we are at 80% or 85% where the federal government plays a role. The Government of Canada has been engaged with reconciliation virtually from the beginning, in the call for the public inquiry and in what we heard earlier today in regard to water.

Could the member, at the very least, acknowledge that a big part of establishing a positive relationship is that we need to ultimately work harder on reconciliation?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, in response to my colleague's question, the Parliamentary Budget Officer disagrees vehemently with his conclusions. After the study he did, he said that the department was failing miserably in the context of the targets it set for itself. In fact, he said that the results are actually declining in spite of the increase in spending.

It is government's Parliamentary Budget Officer that is disputing the government's claim that its investments are working. He is the

one who is saying that the results are not getting better and, as I said in my speech, that the conditions measured are declining. That is the sad part.

• (1935)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I know that the hon. member does care a great deal about this file.

Before I begin, I want to congratulate the newly elected national chief, Cindy Woodhouse from Manitoba. I am sure she will do a fantastic job.

One thing we are talking about in the House today, in a take-note debate, is the failure of Indigenous Services Canada, noting that there is \$7.6 billion in funding that is scheduled to sunset over the next few years. Listening to my colleague talk about how we are not getting our money's worth, I want to remind every member of the House that indigenous people have been lifted up in the international community because of constant human rights abuses, including massive underfunding. One only has to think about the latest Canadian tribunal ruling on child welfare.

Let me tell the House that the Conservatives are no better. When they were elected, first of all, they unanimously voted, on several occasions, against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a minimum human rights document; cut funding to the Native Women's Association; cut funding to Aboriginal Healing Foundation; took money away from residential school survivors; and took money away from the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, from kids in care.

I am wondering, given all of that information, whether my colleague could confirm that all the cuts that I shared with him are in fact true, and whether it is also true that the Conservatives just voted against \$10 million that was supposed to be allocated for indigenous people in the budget last week.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, in my comments tonight around Indigenous Services Canada, I do not think I complained even once about the amount that was being spent. What members heard me challenge was how the money is being spent and the outcomes we are getting as a country for that investment.

I and the Conservative Party are all for lifting up indigenous people and improving the quality of life of indigenous people across our country. I support that, 100%. My colleague knows that I support that. For four years, I have stood up for that in the House.

My point is not the amount of spending; my point is the quality of the spending. We actually need to invest in the right things. We need to hold a failing department accountable so it actually achieves the outcomes and targets it sets for itself. There has to be some accountability. Somebody has to hold these people to account. The minister and the government are not doing that.

Government Orders

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank the member for, as always, his advocacy for indigenous peoples right across the country.

I want to pick up on the very last topic. The member spoke about the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, which showed that the increase in spending that we have seen under the government has not led to a similar increase in the ability of Indigenous Services Canada to meet the targets it set for itself. Can the member speak more to his frustration with that? We have a government that seems to measure its success based on how much money it can spend. If there is an issue, it says it spent this much money on it so it is getting the job done, but clearly, if it is missing its targets and it is not getting the job done, it is not improving the lives of indigenous peoples across the country. Does the member have further comments in that regard?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, as I said in my comments, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has made it clear that there is a lack of accountability and that the investments being made are not being made in a way that is improving the lives of indigenous people across our country. That is what we advocate for.

If we go over my record in Hansard, we will see the word “outcomes” in my interventions, both at committee and in the House, probably hundreds of times. I am all about our getting outcomes. I am all about accountability. I am all about getting results. I believe that is how we are going to make the investments in indigenous people across the country that will result in an improved quality of life and improved standard of living. That is how we are going to get it done.

• (1940)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Chair, by the sounds of it, the member has done a great deal of learning when it comes to indigenous people.

I do not have enough time to lecture the members of this place on the difference between “responsibility” and “partnership”. We have a treaty with many indigenous nations, and it requires us to fulfill that in a good way. However, when we hear language like the member spoke of in terms of the lack of results for funding, it sounds reminiscent of a quote: “Canada's aboriginals need to learn the value of hard work more than they need compensation for the abuse suffered in residential schools.” The member who said that was the member for Carleton, the leader of the Conservative Party today.

Does the member condemn that statement and stand with indigenous people?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, I am not responsible for the comments other people made 15 years ago; that is not on me.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, look at my record. I have advocated for indigenous people across the country consistently. I serve a riding that has 71.3% indigenous people, and I have advocated for them through COVID. I have advocated for them to have economic opportunities that will actually solve the poverty and the challenges they face in their communities, and I will continue to do that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Chair: Order. If members have questions and comments, they should wait until the appropriate time. They should not be heckling the member when he is speaking.

The hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Madam Chair, it is all well and good to talk about a comment someone made 15 years ago, but when the member who made the comment is the leader of a national party in our country, and the member cannot even stand to condemn it, that is truly shameful. I mean that in the sincerest way, because it is a matter of racism and condemning racism. Whether it happened 15 years ago or today, I would hope that the member would find the courage to condemn racism today and then.

Does the member condemn the statements made by the member for Carleton in regard to indigenous people's needing to pull themselves up by their bootstraps?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, if I recall, and it is very clear in the record, that member apologized for what he said 15 years ago.

I would ask whether the member, in his youth, ever said anything he regretted and whether he wants to stand up and apologize for it.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Madam Chair, on a point of order, it is important that we respect people in this place, and I spoke to a true fact that I repeated and quoted into Hansard. The member is making allegations or assumptions that there could be something in my past that I need to apologize for.

I hope we can have decorum and respect when talking about facts in this place, and I would ask the member to reflect on his own statements he has made, in order to better understand how racism truly works in this place.

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the point, but I believe it was more a point of debate.

Does the hon. member have a point of order?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, no. I just wanted to respond.

The Deputy Chair: It was not another question, but a point of order being raised by the hon. member.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with my dedicated colleague from Shefford. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the people of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and my colleagues a happy holiday.

I am very pleased to rise in the House, especially to participate in this take-note debate on indigenous services. Allow me to give my colleagues a general idea of the size of my riding. It currently includes 14 Inuit communities, nine Cree communities and two Algonquin communities.

Government Orders

For decades, the Bloc Québécois has proven itself to be an ally and a voice for indigenous peoples. The Quebec nation has always tried to engage in nation-to-nation relations with indigenous communities. The Bloc Québécois works with indigenous nations to strengthen and guarantee their inherent rights at the federal level.

For us, reconciliation is the core of this relationship. Reconciliation can take many forms: cultural, financial, political and economic. It enables a gradual end to the discriminatory and racist political system developed and implemented by Canada, which wanted the first nations to disappear.

Some action has been taken in the name of reconciliation, but still not enough. In recent years, we have had the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Governments have set up several commissions, and a few commitments followed. However, there is no denying that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

In the most recent supply votes, most of the funding for the Department of Indigenous Services was allocated to the health and housing sectors. One could congratulate the government for finally tackling these issues head-on, but the reality is that it has been shamefully neglecting them for years.

Indigenous communities have always been hit hard by the housing crisis. The poor quality of housing, overcrowding, lack of services and all the other interrelated problems are still there, and they are not going away. It is quite the opposite, in fact. These are major public health issues, but this government never seems to grasp the true extent of this crisis.

Speaking of public health, the government made a promise to lift all boil water advisories in indigenous communities by 2021. As of December 10, there were still 32 in effect. These 32 boil water advisories affect thousands of indigenous people across Canada, keeping them in a constant state of insecurity. That is not dignity. That is not successful reconciliation. If this government were to put a little more energy and investment into the issues that affect indigenous people, and less energy and resources into concocting policies that interfere in provincial jurisdictions, the situation might be quite different.

This government's actions suggest that reconciliation is more of a public relations issue and a communications exercise than a matter of concrete measures and policies. It is disappointing. Reconciliation is an ongoing process founded on respect. We cannot and must not forget the past, but we are living in the here and now. That is why we need to take action here and now. We must consult and communicate, of course, but above all, we must take action. We know that consultations are difficult for the government, especially when it comes to indigenous affairs, but that is the only way we will move forward.

Reconciliation does not mean shirking responsibility. A nation wishes to break free and make its own decisions, but first that nation must have all the tools it needs to do it properly. Otherwise, it is not a question of freeing communities from the yoke of the federal government, but rather the federal government shirking its re-

sponsibilities. These responsibilities go back a long way. The federal government owes them that much.

The Bloc Québécois is once again reaffirming its commitment to forever be an ally and a voice for indigenous peoples. We are looking to the future. We are looking to reconciliation and asking for immediate action.

• (1945)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, one thing of note is how the department has doubled in size in the last 10 years, from about 4,000 to almost 8,000, and the budget has increased significantly as well. The Liberals seem to always judge success by how much money they are spending on things. We see that the budget has gone up and the number of employees for the department has gone up, yet the Auditor General pointed out that they have not made any progress on this. Would the member agree with me that we are obviously not getting good value for money here?

• (1950)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Madam Chair, my colleague is partially right because the government is not moving. Where are we with respect to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action? There is no implementation. Then there is the symbolic day of September 30, for example. Is reconciliation broken? We wonder.

Why does the government always wait until something frustrating happens to indigenous people? It is incomprehensible. We need action now.

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I have sat in committee with the member, and I do appreciate when she speaks up.

I appreciate that the member has reminded the House that her riding has 14 Inuit communities and nine Cree communities. My concern is that their voices are not being heard. Can she share with the House how many of those communities she has visited to make sure that their indigenous voices are being heard by the Bloc since she was elected?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Madam Chair, I really enjoy working with my colleague in committee.

Let me say that I represent several communities in northern Quebec in Nunavik, Lac-Simon, Kitcisakik, Eastmain, Mistissini, Kuujuaq. I have had meetings with these communities. Of course I have not had the time to participate in all these meetings, but the important thing is that they are there and I am there for them. We work together, nation to nation.

Government Orders

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, the member mentioned in her speech water on reserve. I remember in the 2015 election that the Liberals promised this would not be a problem after 2019. I am wondering if she has more comments about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Madam Chair, it is still an issue. There are reserves in my riding that still do not have water, particularly in Kitcisakik. These people have been waiting for years to have water.

The federal government's delay is incomprehensible. We wonder why this is being delayed when the federal government is giving a lot of money to communities across Canada and Quebec. What is going on? Why is the government not listening to what the communities are asking for and what they are saying they need?

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague.

The member talked about consultation and right now, Indigenous Services Canada, or ISC, has been changing funding formulas for education without even talking to the nations that are impacted, so it is hard for them to continue doing their programming with new formulas. It has a huge impact on children, of course.

On ISC engagement with indigenous communities, first nations, Inuit and Métis people, does the member agree that it should be an absolute requirement to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before changing any funding formulas in all areas of service delivery?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Madam Chair, Service Canada should be in direct contact with indigenous communities about their needs.

We are also talking about health care and education. Let us also not forget what was discovered at residential schools and the whole legacy of that. With regard to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we have to talk about the need to be receptive to what indigenous peoples want.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I am finally taking the floor this evening in this take-note debate on indigenous services in Canada.

I would first like to acknowledge the exceptional work done by my colleague from Manicouagan, who is currently vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I have no doubt that she would have had far more to say than I do in this take-note debate. My colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou also had a lot to say. It is interesting to discuss these issues with them.

I am taking the floor tonight with great humility, in my capacity as the status of women critic for the Bloc Québécois and as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Unfortunately, indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by numerous issues. In particular, I am thinking about the problems surrounding resource development in western Canada and the issue of human trafficking and modern slavery. Our committee will soon

be studying the idea of creating a “red dress alert” to try and tackle violence against indigenous women and girls. We conduct study after study, yet one question still gets repeated far too often: Why these women?

Last week, I met with representatives of native friendship centres, who were here on the Hill to make us aware of the important work they are doing for indigenous communities, particularly with respect to promoting languages and passing on their culture and traditions. I want to commend Édith Cloutier and the members of the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, who do vital work and with whom I have had constructive discussions. I hope to have a chance to go visit them on site soon to better understand their reality.

We need programs that are tailored to the culture of indigenous families. We also need to respond to the calls for justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by providing adequate, stable, equitable and ongoing funding for indigenous-centred community health and wellness services that are accessible and tailored to the culture of indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ persons.

We must respond to the calls of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

With regard to the rights of indigenous people to better economic outcomes, they also need better social outcomes and support for their community infrastructure. Indigenous people, including seniors, women, girls and indigenous people from diverse communities, need access to appropriate services, as well as to infrastructure that meets their social and economic needs, such as safe housing and clean drinking water, and that promotes hygiene, health and social security.

We need to ensure that funding for economic development respects the right of indigenous partners to self-determination. We need more entrepreneurship initiatives for indigenous women. We need to increase the supports available to women and improve the social and economic security of indigenous women entrepreneurs. That is another study that we are conducting at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, a study on women's economic empowerment. Of course, indigenous women are under-represented in entrepreneurship. This study looks at that.

I am aware of all the work that still needs to be done. We need to think about the relevance of the Indian Act in 2023.

We need to think in terms of additional legislation on the road to reconciliation. These amendments will help acknowledge, protect and support missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, notably by seeking to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples to give their free and informed consent as part of decision-making processes that affects them—and that must be comprehensive—in order to eliminate gender discrimination in the Indian Act and ensure equal rights.

Government Orders

Our committee is particularly interested in gender-based analysis plus, which, incidentally, should lead us to reflect on the impact our policies have on indigenous women and girls.

Some of the most recent crime statistics were released in 2020, and they indicate that the homicide rate among indigenous people is still seven times higher than among non-indigenous people. The fact that the rate remains so high is a human rights failure for Canada. The completion of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls should not be seen by the government as an end point, but as a starting point. These murders are proof that we are still at square one.

Between 2004 and 2014, while homicide rates were falling across Canada, the number of murdered indigenous women and girls was six times higher than among non-indigenous women and girls. This calls for a new relationship in equal partnership with indigenous people.

In conclusion, we must recognize the root causes of this violence and support indigenous people in their recovery, promote gender equality and help empower women. We also need a nation-to-nation partnership with indigenous peoples, and the Bloc Québécois has long promoted that idea. Those are the hopes that I bring to this debate.

• (1955)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, the member brought up the issue of human trafficking. We know human trafficking happens within 10 blocks of where one lives anywhere in Canada and that first nations people are overrepresented. Despite being only 4% of the population, of the cases the police interact with, they make up 50% of the victims.

Justice for first nations communities is very important, and we see the government failing on this front as well. I am wondering if the member could comment a bit more about that.

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Peace River—Westlock, with whom I co-chair the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. Last year we even went to Winnipeg to reflect on the issue of human trafficking. This all happened at the same time as we were conducting our study at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We are still in the process of finalizing the report. Sadly, while travelling from Halifax to Vancouver via Ontario, we realized that the study we are conducting will confirm that indigenous women are overrepresented among victims of exploitation and human trafficking. It is deplorable that in 2023, we are still at this point.

I think that we will have to go even further and ensure that the report that we produce does not just get shelved. We must jump into action to get our recommendations implemented.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I found it really disturbing today listening to the parliamentary secretary kind of boast about the accomplishments the Liberals have

achieved with clean drinking water. They were elected in 2015 and we still have boil water advisories.

It is now over four years since the national inquiry, and the government still has not fulfilled the calls for justice. On top of that, in the new estimates, murdered and missing indigenous women and girls are not even mentioned once, normalizing genocide in this country.

I have the privilege of sitting with the hon. member on the status of women committee, and I am wondering if she agrees with me that this approach to incremental justice is costing people's lives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre. As she said, we sit on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women together, and it is always a pleasure to speak with her, because she always brings us back to these fundamental human rights issues.

These issues are a stain on our international reputation. I talked about it too quickly in my speech. Why is Canada doing so poorly? Yes, of course, there was an inquiry with calls for justice, but how many of them have been implemented so far? How is Canada tracking its progress? Is it acceptable that in 2023, indigenous communities in a country like Canada do not have access to clean drinking water? It is a fundamental right, and it adds an additional mental burden because, unfortunately, everything to do with water supply and food security too often falls on women, even in 2023.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her speech. I would also like to thank her for mentioning the native friendship centres in Quebec, which are very important and do a tremendous amount of work. In fact, I would like to commend Édith Cloutier, the director of the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre.

I would like my colleague to talk about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We have been talking about this for years. Where are we at? What does my colleague think of the government's inaction on this issue?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for her question and for her work. She knows that I have wanted to go and visit her riding for quite some time. I was supposed to go in 2020 but, unfortunately, my travel plans were postponed because of the pandemic. However, I really want to get there and visit these native friendship centres and indigenous communities.

As the critic for status of women, I think it is crucial that we focus on reconciliation and look at what continues to happen too often to indigenous women and girls, who are overrepresented on too many issues. The native friendship centres are calling on the government to focus on reconciliation and to take action instead of just paying lip service and producing reports.

Government Orders

What happens next? What concrete action is being taken to ensure that true reconciliation can begin?

That is what I am wondering, with all due respect, after discussions I have had with representatives of native friendship centres.

• (2005)

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I will be splitting my time with the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

Representing Nunavummiut and being the indigenous critic for the NDP have led me to rise for this debate. I thank my NDP colleagues for their solidarity in ensuring that this take-note debate occurred this evening.

Prior to my election in 2021, I experienced many injustices because of decisions made by federal governments of the day. My statement this evening starts with the Harper Conservatives' many cuts and outlines the impending cuts by the Liberals' Indigenous Services Canada. I note that my criticisms tonight are only with respect to Indigenous Services Canada. I will begin my criticisms against CIRNAC and Northern Affairs at a later time.

I will start with a quote from indigenous lawyer Pam Palmater, who assessed the Conservative government:

In ten short years, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has set the relationship with First Nations back a hundred years. While all past governments have had a hand in the colonization and oppression of First Nations, the Harper government stands out as one of the most racist and aggressive governments that First Nations have had to work with in many generations.

The government in these 10 years was considered one of the harshest for indigenous peoples. To name a few, Conservatives cut funding to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. They cancelled the Kelowna accord, and we were one of only four countries to vote against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

Indigenous peoples are strong. Despite the Conservatives' attempts to continue their genocidal path, what resulted was one of the strongest forms of indigenous resistance. We saw that with Idle No More. Indigenous peoples were there to fight for their rights and to protect the environment. Indigenous people's resistance can indeed happen again.

Turning to the impending cuts to indigenous services by the Liberals, funding will decline by \$7.6 billion when people are still living in mouldy housing without clean drinking water. There will be almost 1,000 fewer staff to deliver essential programs.

Among the programs that are sunseting are those with funding for mental health and wellness, addressing the legacy of residential schools, Jordan's principle, the Inuit child first initiative and the health and safety of first nations housing, water and community infrastructure. The current funding does not remedy the current shortfalls experienced by indigenous communities or mitigate the future needs given the population growth in indigenous communities.

Implementing such drastic cuts will keep indigenous peoples marginalized. They will be prevented from gaining tools to ensure the reconnecting of their own self-government models. These cuts

will be genocide. The Assembly of First Nations reported a \$350-billion infrastructure gap in first nations communities. These cuts do not even include infrastructure gaps for Inuit and Métis.

The Liberals' current spending does not even meet the current needs of indigenous peoples. Existing gaps cannot be filled with broken promises. We must implore the Liberals to change their path to cutting \$7.6 billion. Otherwise the genocide will continue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I must say that, as much as I appreciate the concern from the member opposite, I do not agree with her conclusions.

I believe the national government has been working side by side with indigenous community leaders for the last eight years. I think the Prime Minister has clearly demonstrated the nation-to-nation building required to deal with issues such as reconciliation, with financial support in record amounts.

Can the member give a clear indication as to what government prior to this government has done more to improve the relationship between two great nations?

• (2010)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Uqaqtittiji*, the Liberal government will be treading on thin ice when it comes to how it is compared to the Conservatives if these cuts are allowed to happen. The member for Vancouver East and I have been working very hard all year to make sure that even one small aspect of housing is delivered. I am speaking about the urban, rural and northern housing initiative, which should have flowed by now, but because of the Liberal government and its delay tactics, we will not see housing built until 2025. This is the impact of the Liberal government, and that is what we need to make sure is clear. It is why we are fighting against the \$7.6 billion in cuts that are being proposed by the Liberal government.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Chair, I believe the member's voice is extraordinary and very necessary in the House of Commons. She brings a lot to this debate. However, I do take offence with the words "genocidal path", referring to the Conservatives. That should be a retraction. We know that in this country there have been mistakes, but at the same time, I believe we are all working to right them and reconciliation is part of that. I believe it is crossing the line to say that our party is on a genocidal path.

Government Orders

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, I have a lot of respect for the member who just asked me that question. Having experienced those cuts as an indigenous person, I cannot retract that. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was doing great work when its funding was cut. Time and time again I have renamed former residential school students who have shared their stories and who were only able to do it because of the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

There was a standing committee report back then, from the aboriginal and northern affairs standing committee of this House, that recommended the Aboriginal Healing Foundation continue its work. Despite the strong recommendations at the committee from federal government officials, the Conservative government at the time still cut those programs. That, to me, is a form of genocide because it impacts the well-being of indigenous people. Therefore, I am sorry, but I cannot retract my statement when I talk about the genocidal path.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, my colleague talked about infrastructure. ISC set a goal of 2030 to catch up on the infrastructure gap, but it has not provided the money to do that. However, the government did provide a lot of hope when it got elected. It gave hope to people that it was going to meet the 2030 goal, but it has not put aside the funds to do that.

I have so much respect for my hon. colleague, and I know this is such a difficult place to walk into given that the government has failed the member's people and failed the Nuu-chah-nulth people where I live. What does the government need to do to meet its promises and the goal of 2030 to close the infrastructure gap?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, it is a very easy answer: The government must stop breaking its promises, invest and make sure those monies are there so the infrastructure gap can be filled.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Chair, I am tremendously honoured to follow my colleague from Nunavut.

Tonight, we have an obligation to speak out against the reduction in spending, the cuts, in Indigenous Services Canada, given the dire needs of indigenous communities. We in the NDP are clear. A reduction of \$7.6 billion in Indigenous Services spending is unacceptable. It flies in the face of the Liberals' commitment to reconciliation. It repeats a colonial approach long waged by Liberal and Conservative governments that have cut spending to indigenous communities. It will further impoverish indigenous communities, which are already the most marginalized in this country.

I would like to speak about the riding that I have the honour of representing, Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, and the reality that our region faces. I am honoured to represent 41 first nations, from Saugeen all the way to the Sayisi Dene. Each first nation is different, but they all share a common reality today, which is rooted in the neglect and the underfunding shown by Canada. Let me be clear about some of the needs.

Last Friday, I stood, along with my colleague from Nunavut, with Chief Harper of Wasagamack First Nation and first nations grand chiefs and chiefs from across Manitoba in calling on Canada to work with Wasagamack and partners to build an airport in their community, which is one of the largest, most isolated communities in Canada. Over 4,000 people are without a road or an airport. It is

a community that relies on ice roads, which are in peril because of climate change.

Tataskweyak Cree Nation needs its school replaced after years of it falling into disrepair. Red Sucker Lake, one of the first nations that the army helped during the pandemic, has issued yet another boil water advisory. They are clear. They need water pipelines. The current system is making their people sick.

Shamattawa, ravaged by numerous house fires over the past year, and yet another community disproportionately impacted by COVID, is clear. It needs 50 homes. Bloodvein, a community on the front lines of huge wildfires, has been clear with ISC for more than a year. It needs a fire truck and somewhere to store it.

Peguis, a community forcibly relocated onto a flood plain, needs flood protection in the face of the climate emergency. Mathias Colomb needs help in pushing forward on its water treatment plant, which has begun but has stalled.

York Factory, Bunibonabee, Manto Sipi, God's Lake, St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Red Sucker Lake and Wasagamack need all-weather road access now, given the fact that climate change is further isolating these communities. Every single one of these needs is known to Indigenous Services Canada. Many of them have been known for years.

These are the realities of the \$350-billion infrastructure gap that first nations face in Canada. It is pretty galling that the Liberals are standing up to talk about the investments they have made in the face of a \$350-billion infrastructure gap, knowing, as we now know, that they are prepared to cut \$7.6 billion in their spending.

Let us be clear. On the infrastructure gap, they have spent less than 3% of what is needed to end the gap since 2015, yet we still have to listen to Liberals talk about how good the situation is. The reality is that the Government of Canada is failing first nations, and abject cruelty will come from the cuts that they are planning.

Government Orders

The idea that they might cut Jordan's principle is shocking, given the absolute need at the community level, as well as the idea that they would not spend on addressing the housing crisis on reserve, given the fact that we know, based on waiting lists of hundreds of people, how acute that housing crisis is. We now know, from the pandemic, that the overcrowded housing, the inadequate housing, contributed to the disproportionate spread of COVID-19 and indigenous people getting more sick than others across our country.

We see failures from this government time and time again. I want to acknowledge the deep cuts and the pain caused by previous Conservative governments, the Harper government.

I will say, as many have said, that the cracks are showing. Many have pointed out that the Liberals are not doing the job when it comes to reconciliation and living up to their commitments to first nations.

This is no way to treat people, much less the first nations this government claims is its most important relationship. These cuts will only bring harm. First nations are watching. The world is watching. Canada can, and must, do better.

● (2015)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, with all due respect, I do not agree with the conclusions that are being drawn, and I do see some politicization of the issue in itself.

I was very much aware of the Lake St. Martin first nation and the flood water diversion caused by the provincial New Democrats. There were assertions and allegations being made on how first nations were completely disrespected, disregarded and told to leave, and we are talking about well over 1,000 residents. It took a decade-plus to resolve that particular issue.

The member is trying to paint a picture that it is the Conservatives and the Liberals. I will not comment on the Conservatives, but I will say that, from the government's perspective, under the Prime Minister, we continue to invest in very real, tangible ways to build on the issue of reconciliation. There has been somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80% of those being, if not acted on, then definitely in the process of being, hopefully, finalized.

I think we have to be careful that we do not necessarily discredit when there has been a great deal of effort by many stakeholders, not just the Government of Canada, in reconciliation and building healthier communities.

● (2020)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair, I will start off by saying that it is well known that the member has a real penchant for deflecting, talking about his time in the Manitoba legislature and pulling up stories from the past. If we were to talk about the diversion projects at the time, I would certainly expect an opportunity for a more full-some discussion.

The reality here is that the Liberals are all too excited to deflect from what are proposed devastating cuts, to the tune of \$7.6 billion, in Indigenous Services. Let us not forget the federal government has the fiduciary obligation to first nations.

As for high-fiving them for success, Indigenous Services has an obligation to indigenous communities to make the investments that are necessary. I just shared a list of at least 15 first nations with dire needs that are not being met by Indigenous Services Canada. That is no reason for the government to try to convince us, gaslight us, that a cut of \$7.6 billion is acceptable, let alone applaud itself for it.

First nations are watching. Canadians are watching. We want to see these cuts reversed and the basic investments made in indigenous communities now.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Chair, the member and her colleagues from the NDP stand in this place and rail against the Liberals for some of the issues they perceive to be caused by the Liberal government in the context of the relationship with indigenous people. My question is actually a simple one: Can the member identify what specific elements of their coalition agreement with the Liberals affect indigenous issues? How are they holding the government to account through that agreement specifically?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair, first off, I am proud of the gains that we have made through our agreement. Obviously, today is a very big day with the announcement of the dental care program. We have made previous announcements and are certainly hoping for a lot more. For us, it has been very important to see the government deliver for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

However, we are clear today, and we have been clear in the House right from day one of this Parliament, that the Liberals need to step up and do far more when it comes to their obligations to indigenous communities. The NDP is the reason this debate is happening, and I am very glad to see the other parties agree to it because it is very clear that we cannot stay silent. Communities are going to be hurt by these cuts, devastated in fact by these cuts, and we need to see the Liberals reverse course.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is a privilege for me to speak to our government's commitment to closing the infrastructure gap in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

Earlier, the Minister of Indigenous Services introduced Bill C-61, an act respecting water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure on first nation lands. My riding of London West neighbours and houses members of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, the Chippewas of the Thames and the Munsee-Delaware Nation. This bill is really important. It is a step forward for my community and for ensuring that everyone in Canada has access to safe and clean drinking water.

Government Orders

First nations have long called for legislation that affirms their inherent rights, recognizes their stewardship in keeping water clean and meets first nations' needs. This bill is part of the government's commitment to establish new proposed safe drinking water and waste water legislation in consultation with first nations. Today, my remarks will focus on infrastructure and indigenous housing.

The federal government is committed to closing the infrastructure gaps in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities by 2030. Since 2016, we have committed more than \$25 billion to support these efforts. Despite these investments, we know more work is needed. In the 2022-23 period, the department engaged with first nations, Inuit and Métis to identify and prioritize the infrastructure needs in their communities, and the work required to close this gap.

The government will continue to work directly with indigenous partners and other federal organizations to identify what further measures and investments may be required. This includes working with first nations communities and organizations, other government departments and financial institutions to define a new approach to how the department funds infrastructure for first nations lands. Exploring how new financial tools could improve infrastructure service delivery will be a fundamental aspect of this infrastructure modernization.

We know that housing is a fundamental need across the country, and we know that indigenous peoples are more likely than the general population to experience poor housing conditions and overcrowding. As part of our responsibility, our government supports indigenous housing across the country, from the east, west, north and south, not only on reserve, but also in rural and urban areas.

I want to emphasize two important points. Indigenous housing is backed by significant funding. In fact, budgets 2022 and 2023 committed up to \$4.3 billion and \$4 billion, respectively. Since 2016, we have been tracking the progress that we have made together on housing, although we acknowledge that there is still so much work to do. Indigenous housing priorities are being co-developed or led by indigenous peoples with a focus on specific needs of first nations, Inuit, Métis and self-governing modern treaty groups. In other words, Indigenous Services Canada does not work alone. Whether for water, housing or infrastructure, the department works with indigenous communities to make sure that we have the tools they can use to decide for themselves.

That is why I want to highlight a few successful and innovative approaches to housing that have been developed by indigenous peoples. I will begin with the Nuxalk in Bella Coola, British Columbia, which has been building homes designed by and for their own people for many years now. This started with Richard Hall, a Nuxalk Red Seal carpenter, who worked in construction for 33 years as a builder and building inspector, on and off-reserve. Richard noticed that existing houses were not suitable for the climate, which is very wet, with high winds and erratic temperatures. He created a design for homes and other buildings that could withstand these conditions. He also noticed that existing homes were not suited for all that people did in their kitchens to cook fish and wild game. Ventilation was improved with people being taught new maintenance and home care tips.

Through its B.C. regional office, Indigenous Services Canada supported Nuxalk Nation with developing and implementing its own housing strategies. The Nuxalk Nation leveraged this funding, along with their own equity and other financing partners, to implement this vision for culturally appropriate and safe housing. They further reduced costs by using their own resources, such as timber and a mill.

There are so many other examples of innovative housing across the country that I could share. For example, indigenous innovators are moving forward in developing their own ideas under their indigenous homes innovation initiative. The initiative has an indigenous steering committee made up of first nations, Inuit and Métis nation experts in infrastructure and housing.

• (2025)

The selected innovators come from all regions of Canada and their ideas cover a range of new ways to respond to indigenous and social housing needs. The innovators are provided with mentoring support from indigenous architects and other professionals to refine their ideas and build fully implementable projects.

Some of the projects include the following. The Central Urban Métis Federation of Saskatoon built the Round Prairie Elders' Lodge, a three-storey complex with 26 one-bedroom units. This facility offers wraparound health and cultural supports, enabling Métis seniors to live independently in an environment that provides services to address age-related challenges.

This past July, the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre in Ontario built a three-floor, 30-single-unit transitional housing facility called Suswin Village. It provides safe, accessible and dignified housing for indigenous community members who are ready to leave the emergency shelter system. Suswin, which means "nest" in Ojibwa, provides stable housing and necessary services to find permanent housing, employment and overall long-term success. The lower level is being used for programming, counselling, life skills teaching and other gatherings.

As I noted earlier, the responsibility for housing is shared, with partnership playing an important role to address on-reserve housing needs. Targeted funding, in addition to ongoing funding from Indigenous Services Canada, supports housing projects in first nation communities, including new builds, retrofits and renovations.

As of September 30, 2023, ISC is supporting 4,631 housing projects in 611 first nation communities. In 2023, so far, 2,763 new homes have been built, another 5,956 homes renovated and upgraded, and many more are under way. Another 1,500 housing-related capacity development and innovation projects have been funded in first nation communities. This includes supporting the creation and implementation of housing authorities and housing management training.

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada is working in partnership with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Inuit treaty organizations on the delivery of Inuit-specific investments premised on self-determination and the implementation of the co-developed Inuit Nunangat housing strategy. Since 2016, when the government began providing direct funding to Inuit partners, more than 500 new units have been constructed, with many more units repaired and critical Inuit-led housing programming expanded. This success will be accelerated by the budget 2022 investment of \$845 million over the next seven years.

The four Inuit treaty organizations determined housing delivery. Delivering housing in Inuit Nunangat and supporting those most in need requires all levels of government to work together. This approach to housing differs in each of these four regions of Inuit Nunangat and can involve regional governments, public and private partners, provincial or territorial governments and of course the Government of Canada.

• (2030)

In 2018, a Canada-Métis nation housing sub-agreement was signed by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Métis nation leadership. The sub-agreement outlined the design, delivery and administration of housing services undertaken, such as purchasing new houses, repairing existing houses and providing rent supplements to families in most need. To date, governing members of the Métis National Council and the Manitoba Métis Federation have bought or built 1,575 housing units and have renovated an additional 4,600 housing units. They have also provided down payment assistance to 1,537 households and rental supports to 9,528 households.

In March, the Manitoba Métis Federation opened Fre Maachi, which means “fresh beginnings” in Michif, with four two-bedroom suites and 16 studios, including six accessible units. The building includes a spiritual room, access to computers, free Wi-Fi, fully furnished units, free laundry and more. Fre Maachi provides wraparound services like mental health and addiction help, employment and training, and cultural programming.

In closing, the federal government has a responsibility for infrastructure and housing, but we are not the only ones. It will take all levels of government to work together, and many other partners.

• (2035)

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Chair, one of the concerns I see with Indigenous Services Canada is that there has been quite an increase in funding since the Liberal government took office but, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed, this increase in funding has not led to a similar increase in the ability of ISC to achieve its goals.

Government Orders

This means that for first nations, including 42 throughout the Kenora riding, we have not seen the increase in services and the increase in the standard of living that we would expect and that we need to see to help these communities and help these people thrive.

Can she provide some comments as to what the government is going to do to ensure that these dollars are flowing to where they need to go, rather than just bloating the bureaucracy further?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague on the other side for his question and for the co-operation we are able to have from time to time.

Respectfully, I think he is not qualified to ask any questions on this issue, given that his party and his leader, when they were in government, built about 99 homes for indigenous communities.

I just finished talking about the fact that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of the responsibility we have toward indigenous communities across the country. We continue to work to make sure that we are responding to the needs of the indigenous communities. There is always room for improvement, but I respectfully say that my colleague on the other side will have to speak to his leader to do better and actually make a better commitment to indigenous communities across the country.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I wonder if the member has looked at her government's own website. Indigenous Services Canada's website has shown that it is going to be making billions of dollars' worth of cuts, including to, for example, Jordan's principle, which is set to sunset and the government intends not to renew Jordan's principle. I know that we all realize how important Jordan's principle is, given how dire the situation is that indigenous peoples continue to be in.

Can the member explain what she is seeing of the cuts or the programs that will be sunset and what she will do to make sure that we help reverse those decisions?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Madam Chair, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the member opposite for all the work that she does in this House. I have had the pleasure of getting to know her and her community, the work she does and the advocacy she does for her community in this House.

I think she has asked a great question. I would like to mention that since this government has been in office, we have increased our funding to indigenous communities and our commitment to funding to Indigenous Services by 150%. As I said earlier in my speech, there is a lot of work to be done. There is a lot of room for improvement. We continue to work across the aisle and across the country, working with communities directly to make sure we are responding to the needs of the communities across the country.

Government Orders

She asked what I would do to make sure that this funding is ongoing. I will continue to work with her, continue to advocate on behalf of our communities and make sure that we do this in partnership.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Chair, I often find it both a tragedy and a comedy that we are in this place. The question from the hon. member for Nunavut was whether the member was able to identify the fact that Indigenous Services Canada is cutting millions of dollars in programs and services, including but not limited to an important program, Jordan's principle, that protects children in care from dying.

To the member, again, can she recognize that her government's cuts will harm children, yes or no?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Madam Chair, I want to thank the member opposite for his advocacy and the work he does in this House; it is very important.

I also think it is important that we continue to work together. I said in my speech that there is a lot of work left to be done and we continue to do that work together. I am open to continue to work with colleagues across the aisle to make sure that we strengthen our advocacy for the communities we all care about.

• (2040)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thought my colleague's speech was very interesting, especially as it related to the challenges around housing for Indigenous communities.

The community of Kahnawake, which is in my riding, is an urban community. However, it faces its own challenges.

A project was recently approved by Indigenous Services Canada. It is a halfway house for Mohawk youth, with services delivered by Mohawk professionals, in the community of Châteauguay.

Does my colleague think that this is a good approach?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Madam Chair, I am very pleased that my colleague was able to tell us about this concrete example from her community.

In my speech earlier, I talked about the responsibilities of the federal, provincial and municipal governments. We must all work together to ensure that more housing is built for indigenous communities across the country.

Just as my colleague mentioned an example in her community, I also mentioned examples involving Manitoba and Saskatoon. The important thing is to ensure that these kinds of projects are done by and for indigenous communities across the country, and to ensure that culturally appropriate services are in place and ready to meet the needs and challenges faced by the various communities across the country.

That is our responsibility. We are in the process of doing just that. We are prepared to continue to make amendments to this type of legislation to ensure that the needs of indigenous peoples across the country are met.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I heard my colleague talk about the housing challenges facing indigenous peoples.

I spoke about the overrepresentation of indigenous women and girls among the victims of domestic violence, but can it be normal, in 2023, that there should also be such a significant overrepresentation of indigenous persons when it comes to homelessness?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Madam Chair, I really appreciate that question. We have been talking about homelessness since I entered politics in 2018. It is important that we can continue to build housing across the country to try to reduce homelessness.

I think that my colleague who also voted during the 30-hour marathon at the end of last week, may know that, on this side of the House, we are prepared to continue supporting projects in collaboration and partnership with communities in need to try to combat homelessness in the country.

I appreciate the work that my colleague does on this, and I hope to be able to continue working with her to eradicate homelessness in Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak about Indigenous Services and the failures within that department. It is always a pleasure. I will be splitting my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock and I look forward to hearing his wise words as well.

We are here tonight to discuss Indigenous Services and how, in the Conservatives' opinion, it is failing indigenous people right across this country. What seems to be the constant theme with this department, backed up by the Parliamentary Budget Officer and reinforced by the Auditor General, is that the government is spending more, but achieving less, and the departmental targets reflect those reports.

The department itself is hitting less than 20% of its annual targets. These are targets set by the department itself, but it seems to have an issue with achieving the targets. Indigenous people on the ground expecting a service or level of care are not getting it. We are hearing that over and over again. Not only that, the cost of living crisis that we are dealing with is exacerbating the problem.

Today we heard of another leader within the provincial government, Premier-Elect Simpson, who is now calling for the elimination of the carbon tax, or at least a carve-out, in the Northwest Territories. This is on top of the 133 chiefs across Ontario who are taking the government to court seeking relief. It amplifies the fact that not only is Indigenous Services failing at what it does, but indigenous people are not better off because of the government. The policies are failing and indigenous people want relief. These communities want the cost of their goods and services to come down, not continue to go up.

Government Orders

I will go over some of the Auditor General's reports, which said that ISC failed to provide support first nations communities need to manage emergencies, such as floods and wildfires; actions were reactive instead of preventive, despite first nations communities themselves laying out an action plan; indigenous-led projects were ignored by the department; ISC did not implement a risk-based approach to manage emergencies, which was required under the Emergency Management Act; it did not use information about risks faced by first nations and the capacity of first nations to respond to those emergencies; ISC spent 3.5 times more on responding to emergencies than on supporting first nations communities, in fact, preparing them with 112 unfunded infrastructure projects, 74 of which had been in the department's backlog for more than five years. That list goes on and on. Unfortunately, there are people on the ground in communities that are suffering because of it.

When we have a department that continues to gobble up more and more dollars and does not get results, where are the objectives for reconciliation being met? Unfortunately, people are suffering because of it.

I am looking at the ISC's core responsibilities. Under "Services and Benefits to Individuals", there is no change in the results. Results, in some cases, are six years old, yet we seen an increase in staffing planned, 1,700 to 1,824, an increase of 7%, but again there is no improvement in services. There is a decrease in services, an increase in the cost of living, indigenous communities are looking for help and asking for relief in housing, health care and the justice portfolio. We have studied all this at committee, but the problems continue to get worse.

A pet peeve of mine, when we were looking at non-insured health benefits, is that ISC is still using a fax machine, if anyone can believe it, to fax prescriptions to the department. It is absolutely incredible that this continues to go on. We hear about this at committee, and people on the ground are hurting because of it.

Let us axe the tax for farmers, first nations and families forever and help indigenous people looking to ISC for help.

• (2045)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Chair, I have a great deal of respect for the hon. member who just spoke. However, one of the most important pieces of indigenous relations to this country is ensuring that one understands the principles one is advocating.

The member and the other Conservative member earlier are so narrowly focused on the outcomes of their carbon tax debate that they have not even mentioned clean water issues on reserves today. They have not mentioned the genocide facing the 2SLGBTQI+ community and murdered and missing women. They have not mentioned the infrastructure gap. We are left to beg the question: What are the priorities of the Conservative Party if not to recognize the treaty and aboriginal and indigenous inherent rights that are found in this country and in our Constitution?

To the member's point about the carbon tax specifically, it is important that he recognizes that federal taxation in Canada writ large should ultimately be exempted on first nations reserves, which is something that is found within the Indian Act.

If the member was so concerned about affordability on reserves, would he agree that it is time to ensure that first nations have true partnership in relation to all resource projects, including when they say no to them?

• (2050)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, there is a lot to unpack there, but I actually did mention it. Unfortunately, I only had five minutes, but I did cover health and justice specifically. We did a study in committee talking about indigenous policing. We are actually working on things as a party to address that. So, I disagree with the member; it was outlined.

On resource projects, yes, we would like to see more built across Canada, but in order to do that, we do need to have first nations involvement, and we are already seeing it right across the country. We are seeing it with Trans Mountain and others where there are equity stakes in these projects. First nations themselves are getting involved in these projects and actually creating wealth opportunity for their nations. This is something that, yes, in some cases we have done right and some cases we have done wrong, but let us improve on that, get better and come together as a country.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, I want to thank the hon. colleague for his impressive speech on this.

One of the issues that the Liberals brought up in a previous speech is around housing and that housing is a shared responsibility. I was wondering if the member has any more comments around that.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, I appreciate the work of the member for Peace River—Westlock. He is a member of the indigenous and northern affairs committee, and I enjoy working with him and his additions to the debate that he is bringing to us today.

Housing is something that we have heard is an ongoing issue with indigenous communities, first nations, in particular, and Inuit as well. We know that housing is often cramped and in need of repair, and that a lot of that was exacerbated during the pandemic where people were forced to live in conditions that were greatly unacceptable. ISC, unfortunately, has yet to improve on those actual outcomes. So, most of the discussion that we are bringing on this side is about actually getting results.

The bar is not how much money we spend; yes, it is an important piece, but if we are spending a lot of money and getting no results, something is wrong. So, we need to actually have that conversation about how we get better outcomes in this picture.

Government Orders

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, I deeply respect my colleague.

I am very curious, because the member mentioned that there are equity relationships where indigenous communities are buying up equity stakes. One of the things that is required for that are loan guarantees. In the fall economic statement, that was one of the principle features of our economic reconciliation. I was wondering why the member opposite and his party voted against that measure when it was brought forward last Thursday and Friday.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, I do appreciate the contribution from the minister. Likewise, I do have lot of respect for that member as well.

We do thank the member for bringing in the loan guarantee program. In fact, it was in our platform, and we appreciate the fact that the Liberals took that piece and started to implement it. However, overall, in that 30 hours of voting, the 135 votes of no confidence was exactly that: We have no confidence in this government. We want to have the carbon tax election.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, it is my honour to rise tonight and speak to this debate as well. I guess I would sum it up by two different sayings. In Alberta, we have a saying, “all hat and no cattle” and in the car business, we have a saying, “all show and no go”. I think those statements sum up precisely what the Liberals' actions have been on a whole host of fronts and on indigenous services as well.

The government's assessment of success is whether it spends a lot of money. Generally, the Liberal government spends a lot of money. There is no doubt about that. Every time it is faced with a problem, it gets out the Canadian chequebook to write a cheque, to say that it has spent a particular amount of money on a particular issue, but never does it go back to assess the results; never does it go back to see if it is actually achieving anything to make things better.

The Auditor General's report says the government has made some dramatic promises in the past. I particularly remember running in the 2015 election and the Liberals saying that by 2019 there would be no more boil water advisories in first nations communities. 2019 has come and gone, nearly four years ago, and we still have boil water advisories in first nations communities.

We now see that the Liberals are hedging a little bit. They are saying housing is a shared responsibility. No doubt. That has always been the case. The vast majority of housing in Canada is built by private individuals, built by private money. That has always been the case. Do members know what has happened under Liberal rule? Housing prices have doubled in this country. The time it takes to get a down payment has doubled. The interest rate has gone up maybe three times in the last eight years. The average mortgage payment has doubled over the last eight years under the Liberal Prime Minister. We have continually seen a lack of caring about the results, only caring about how much money they have spent.

I am sure the Liberals will stand up and say that when the leader of the Conservatives was minister of housing, he only spent this much money while we have spent way more money—

• (2055)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Chair, on a point of order, we are having a take-note debate tonight about Indigenous Services Canada and it would be nice if the member actually spoke about that. That is what we are here to talk about.

It is a critical life-and-death matter for indigenous people in this country. He could respect indigenous people by at least referring to them in his speech.

The Deputy Chair: I Just want to remind members that there is some flexibility in the speeches. The hon. member has two minutes and 15 seconds. I am sure he is going to bring it to the matter that is before the House.

I do want to remind members that the take-note debate before the House is about indigenous services.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I would just recommend that the member turn up her earpiece, because the whole speech to this point has been on that exact topic, which is the fact that the government makes significant promises. I mentioned and referenced that, in 2015, the Liberal government ran on a promise to end boil water advisories on reserves, and it has failed. However, the Liberals will tell us all about the money they spent.

The government is completely averse to talking about the results, and we have seen that over the years. The Auditor General's report on ISC, Indigenous Services Canada, included the fact that the goals and targets are ever moving and ever decreasing. These are the targets that the department sets for itself. The Auditor General noted that, repeatedly, not only has the department failed to meet those targets, but it is also then cherry-picking and lowering its targets. One thing that was pointed out is that, when the department is judging graduation rates, it is using students who are participating in the provincial education system, essentially to boost its numbers. The department had over 83 targets across the country, and it only met 69% of them.

This is while the department has grown by nearly 100%. Over the last four years, the department grew from 4,100 to 7,000 individuals working there. The Liberals love to build bureaucracy. It always bumps their numbers as they hire more people in Ottawa and can easily say that they spent more money on this. On top of all that, the department has hired more people and continues to have to downgrade its targets or still fails to meet them. We see this over and over again. Beyond all that, the department continues to give its folks bonuses for failing to reach these targets.

Government Orders

• (2100)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, the member kept on talking about all the doubling of this and doubling of that, but key, critical investments from Indigenous Services Canada to tribal councils did not double. In fact, it did not double under the Conservatives' watch when the Harper government was in power. The Conservatives cut that funding dramatically. Between the Liberals and the Conservatives, the governments cut that funding in half over 20 years.

These are critical services that the tribal councils, including the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council in my riding, deliver for women, girls and elders, as well as for education and for health care, which are essential services to keep them safe and healthy. The government has failed in its promises. Indigenous peoples and tribal councils had hope when the current Liberal government was coming to power. Do the Conservatives regret cutting these essential services and funding to tribal councils, and not just the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council, but tribal councils right across this country?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I cannot verify anything that the member said, but I will say that, in Alberta, first nations communities have stepped up and invested in oil and gas production. They are outraged about the fact that the Prime Minister goes to COP and makes announcements to get accolades on the world stage while putting our people back here at home in jeopardy. Over 100 first nations are substantially invested in oil and gas production in northern Alberta, and they are being hamstrung by the current government. The revenue that is generated by first nations participating in these major energy projects across northern Alberta brings prosperity to every one of these communities and allows them to do the things that they need to do to ensure a prosperous and healthy life for all their members.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Chair, I am pleased to note that my colleague from Alberta has risen on this very important topic. Speaking of Alberta, given that the member mentioned this in his response, we have a circumstance of first nations' rights being under attack by the provincial government of Alberta, and we have a lacklustre federal government that is unwilling to protect the treaty and inherent rights of Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7 and Treaty No. 8 in regard to the unconstitutional sovereignty act that the United Conservative Party of the province is ramming through and forcing first nations to accept. Will the member join members from Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7 and Treaty No. 8 in their near unanimous opposition to the terrible, unconstitutional and racist policy that is the sovereignty act?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I thought the member was going to talk about Bill C-53.

Nonetheless, I would note that the Alberta government has been one of the few governments in this country to put together a fund so that indigenous communities could have an equity stake. They can use that fund to pursue equity stakes in major energy projects. This has brought economic reconciliation to first nations across northern Alberta, ensuring that all Canadians get to participate in the economy and ensuring prosperity for everyone.

When people can take home a powerful paycheque, it gives them the freedom to live their life in the way they feel is necessary. I will

never apologize for ensuring that we can have full economic reconciliation in this country.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Madam Chair, this member has been here a long time, and he should know and understand that the colleagues I have, my indigenous brothers and sisters and my relatives across northern Alberta are in a particular condition of poverty right now. That poverty has long been represented in the province, and people's needs have not been served by the ill wishes of corporations that continue to take our lands for granted and continue to pollute our waters.

As a matter of fact, we have seen some of the largest oil spills just recently. Chief Allan Adam has made those spills very clear. In Cold Lake, for example, we are seeing the seeping of their tailings pond there as well.

The issue that is most important and on the top of first nations' minds is this: When faced with these terrible circumstances related to our land, the members only speak about their own interests, their interests for their political, narrow power grab. When it comes to first nations, Métis and Inuit people in this country, we never hear about the constitutional rights that these people have.

Could the member verify that there are, in fact, treaty rights in Alberta, and those rights are directly impacted by the illegal sovereignty act?

• (2105)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I am not exactly sure what the member is getting at. What I know is that Alberta's interest in ensuring that the oil patch continues to operate and brings prosperity to all Canadians is an imperative.

In Stephen Buffalo's article, he noted:

...the government is cutting our feet out from under us again. Over the past decade, Ottawa slowed pipeline development, passed legislation that hampered resource development, imposed increasingly strict controls on fossil fuel development, and created new levies and taxes to thwart our efforts.

These are indigenous leaders who are trying to bring prosperity to their communities. I do not know why the member wants to stand in the way of that.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would first like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Earlier today, I joined the Minister of Indigenous Services as she introduced Bill C-61, an act respecting water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure on first nation lands.

[*Translation*]

This bill is an important step toward ensuring that all Canadians have access to safe, clean drinking water.

*Government Orders**[English]*

First nations have long called for legislation that affirms their inherent rights, recognizes their stewardship in keeping water clean and meets first nations' needs. This bill is part of our government's commitment to establishing new proposed safe drinking and waste-water legislation in consultation and in conjunction with first nations.

It closely aligns with the ongoing efforts of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to strengthen relationships between the federal government and indigenous people. This collaboration with CIRNAC is essential in addressing the broader context of indigenous rights and self-determination.

On a personal note, upon my appointment as the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, I emphasized that my contribution to this role stems from a lived experience, a profound understanding of what survival entails, the impact of oppression and the enduring effects of colonialism.

I bring this perspective in the most personal and heartfelt manner, and I am committed to working in partnership with indigenous communities to walk the path of reconciliation, which includes improving water and waste-water operations. On this note, I would like to thank my colleagues opposite for their incredible advocacy and their persistent efforts to keep the government accountable.

First nations have put in the hard work required, with support from Indigenous Services Canada, to lift 143 long-term drinking water advisories.

We recognize that there is more to do. For the 28 active long-term advisories that still exist, there are comprehensive action plans in place for each of the 26 affected communities. Our government is collaborating with first nations to lift advisories on public systems as quickly as possible.

We will continue to make sustainable investments that support access to safe and clean drinking water in first nations. This includes expanding existing water delivery systems and supporting local water operators with their regular monitoring and testing of water quality.

This commitment is paying off, as 267 short-term advisories have been prevented from becoming long-term advisories. Moreover, many of these have been resolved quickly by operators.

For example, in Yukon, the circuit rider training program is implemented by Yukon University, with the support of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. This is one example of our government supporting first nations as they take control of their water operations.

This program is funded by Indigenous Services Canada and delivered on-site. It provides training and support to local water operators, who are responsible for monitoring and maintaining water systems in first nations communities.

We acknowledge that it is not enough to only eliminate existing long-term drinking water advisories. We need to ensure that everyone in Canada can have reliable access to safe drinking water. In order to make this happen, first nations must have the capacity to

operate their own water systems and the self-determination access to do so.

This year, Warren Brown from Lytton First Nation received the 2023 National First Nations Water Leadership Award for his outstanding commitment to protecting his community's water supply. While others in his community evacuated to escape the threat of wildfires in 2021, Brown stayed behind to maintain the community's water treatment plant. This meant that the community was able to enjoy clean drinking water when they returned home. Today, Warren Brown operates 13 drinking water systems and has helped lift six long-term drinking water advisories.

Last year, Indigenous Services Canada launched a call for proposals to identify how water operators on reserves can be better supported. This led to the funding of training workshops for current water operators, as well as funding for programs to attract new water operators in the field.

● (2110)

We have seen meaningful results from our government's effort to help first nations control their own water infrastructure. Transformative work is happening in first nations communities across Canada. The Atlantic First Nations Water Authority is a leading example of first nations showing innovative solutions to water solutions. This central water authority supports first nations communities in Atlantic Canada to upgrade, maintain and manage water and waste-water services. Most importantly, this authority is controlled by first nations and is a strong example of a step toward self-determination.

The AFNWA draws from traditional values, culture and knowledge to help guide its operators. The work merges indigenous knowledge, such as the seven grandfather teachings, with western science, which is an approach called two-eyed seeing. For those who may not be familiar with two-eyed seeing, it is a guiding principle that encourages the simultaneous use of indigenous and western world views. It recognizes the values of both perspectives, allowing communities to draw from the strengths of both traditions to find innovative and holistic solutions.

Part of the reason we are seeing these important strides forward is that communities can implement different solutions according to their own needs. There is no one-plan-fits-all approach. This work is guided at a community's own pace. This emphasis on self-determination allows communities to tailor solutions to their unique needs. The positive outcomes of this approach are evident in the success stories we have witnessed across various regions.

Our government recognizes that we must work in partnership with indigenous communities to ensure that everyone has access to safe and clean drinking water. First nations partners show innovation and leadership in water practices, and we must ensure that communities have the tools and resources they need to implement their own approach and solutions.

In conclusion, this is an ongoing commitment. The collaboration efforts between our government and first nations communities are about an enduring partnership. There will always be more work to do, and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Chair, I asked a question of the parliamentary secretary earlier and I want to get the minister's take on it as well.

I looked at the website for Crown Indigenous Relations, which is his department, in the context of water legislation. It talks about the engagement approach, which includes “advancing development of a legislative proposal” with the Assembly of First Nations, “ongoing direct engagement with First Nations rights holders, Modern Treaty and Self Governing Nations” and “engaging provinces and territories”.

What we heard earlier from the parliamentary secretary is that it almost seemed like that was an opportunity to fill out a form. In a statement from the FSIN today, it said:

...the first public draft released by Canada in February was developed in secret by Indigenous Services Canada without any direct input from First Nations, a fact that has been raised by the Assembly of First Nations and several regional First Nations organizations over the course of 2023.

Can the minister maybe clarify a bit about how the consultation was done? Was there any going out and talking to people or was there just an online application where people got to participate in the process?

• (2115)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, I know Bill C-61 is not the subject of our conversation today, but it is one of the first co-developed pieces of legislation that has been introduced. It really stems from the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or UNDRIP. In many ways it was co-developed, and there were a number of different elements to that. One of them was consultation, which included two sets of consultations. One was for the initial draft and the second was for an improved draft. Subsequent to that, there was a group that did work, and many of them spoke today. We had the Chiefs of Ontario and Grand Chief Glen Hare, for example, who spoke today, and others spoke about the work they did to co-develop.

I am very proud of the fact that this was co-developed. I think we can take a lot of learning from here and apply it to other legislation we are developing and co-developing. I look forward to working with my colleague to improve this process.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the hon. minister for his comments. I know he spoke about Bill C-61, but here is the thing: It is 2023 and the government is patting itself on the back because we do not have that many more boil water advisories to deal with. There are 26. It is abhorrent. The normalization of violating the rights of indigenous people is so accepted in Canada and by the government that we are

Government Orders

bragging that there are still 26 boil water advisories. I find this shocking.

What we are actually here to talk about is the sunset of \$7.6 billion in programs to Indigenous Services Canada. We know that, under the current situation, this is costing people's lives. I have had the pleasure of working a lot with the minister around the issue of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, two-spirit people and gender-diverse folks, and some of these cuts will make the difference between somebody living or not.

Does my hon. colleague agree with me that these cuts are reckless, knowing that most of these programs are underfunded? Is he committed to doing whatever he needs to do to make sure that does not happen?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, at the outset, let me just deal with the issue of water. The fact that any Canadian parliamentarian can stand up and still say we have 26 boil water advisories, where communities do not have access to clean drinking water, is deeply embarrassing and deeply hurtful. I think it is deeply problematic.

However, the fact is that there has been incredible progress, progress based on what indigenous people, first nations people, have asked for. It is no longer about the federal government procuring 150 systems and saying, let us implement these across Ontario or another region. It is about ensuring that there is local ability, procurement and self-determination over what that system looks like. It is one of the reasons we are here today. There are still 26 to go, and I am confident that we will get to the end point.

On the issue of sunset of some of the programs, it is important to recognize that many of our programs are multi-year, whether it is three or five years. Particularly with COVID, we had even longer periods of programming that came in that could sunset. Collectively speaking, our government has been consistently renewing and re-establishing programs based on evolving needs. We will not, under any circumstances, compromise the progress we have made with Indigenous Services.

We will continue to ensure that every young person in indigenous communities is supported. The services that ISC provides are so critical. We realize that, and we will continue to ensure that funding is sustained and people are supported throughout Canada in order—

• (2120)

The Deputy Chair: We do have to allow for other questions. I have been trying to get the hon. minister's attention.

Government Orders

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Châteauguay—Lacolle.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I listened with great interest to the speech by the hon. minister. I am trying to understand something. I have seen Auditor General reports over the years since my time here in 2015, and it was a horrendous situation. In fact, the late Auditor General, Michael Ferguson, made it his special mission to bring attention to this situation.

How did we get to that place in 2015 when it was just a horrific state of affairs? What was the major change, in his opinion, that brought us at least to a better place? We are not in a perfect place, but at least we are in a better place.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, it is simplistic sometimes to say there is one particular incident that led us to this place. I think there were successive governments that underfunded Indigenous Services.

When we took office in 2015, one of the most important aspects of the Prime Minister's commitment and our mandate was to ensure that we walk the path of reconciliation, which means two things. One is to close the gaps, and I would argue it is about eliminating the gaps. When an indigenous child and a non-indigenous child are born today, they should have the same opportunities and the same outcomes, regardless of who they are. I think that is something we still need to work harder at. I believe that is the path we are on.

The second piece is the work that I do with long-term reconciliation, making sure that self-determination is at the core of the work that we are doing. It is no longer an Ottawa-driven approach. It is an approach that is driven by communities based on their needs, based on their values, and the role of the federal government is to support those initiatives.

I want to thank my friend for that question, and I look forward to continuing on this path toward reconciliation.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, I did not know I was going to get a second opportunity.

In four years, the department has grown from 4,200 full-time employees to 7,070. In 2021-22, despite only reaching 17% of the departmental targets it set for itself, 94.6 of the employees at the executive level or above at ISC received performance pay.

Would the minister agree that the significant disconnect between individual performance and organizational outcomes is a big reason we are having these conversations today? We need to hold somebody accountable and I wonder if he agrees.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, I am not going to speak for ISC, but I can tell the member that we have a whole-of-government approach when it comes to reconciliation. As I indicated earlier, the need to close the gap is essential, and the work we have been doing over the last eight years is toward that goal. Whether with respect to the first nations and Inuit health branch, implementing Jordan's principle or the Indigenous Languages Act, just name the program, we have been investing to ensure that we close the gaps.

There is still work to do. I look forward, as a government, to not only doing the work but also ensuring that we are at a place where we are no longer having this debate. It is about moving forward on a true path to reconciliation.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London.

I want to spend my time in tonight's debate talking especially about the Auditor General's report "Emergency Management in First Nations Communities", which came out last year. I have been involved in public accounts off and on for the eight years I have been in this place, and I have seen some eye-wateringly incompetent services or performances by the government. It is almost as if the various ministers are in competition to see who can be the most inept.

There have been several contenders for the award. The Auditor General did a housing study in which it was discovered that the government did not even know whom it was housing, how many people it was housing or how many housing units were getting built, despite billions of dollars being spent, with Infrastructure Canada blaming CMHC for the failures, and vice versa, literally. However, not to worry; executives at Infrastructure Canada and CMHC all still got full bonuses despite the failure. Veterans Affairs was spending money on new programs to alleviate the wait-lists, with no ability to track whether the backlogs had improved or not. Here is a spoiler alert: They had not improved, and had actually gotten worse every year since 2015. However, not to worry; executives all received performance bonuses. The CRA ignored the Auditor General's warnings about over \$27 billion of ineligible funding going out to corporations that should not have received the money. One would think that, with so many incompetent departments, perhaps the CRA or another organization would come out as the winner. However, not to worry; along came Indigenous Services and said it would take the gold medal.

The report is specifically about the emergency management of first nations communities, probably the very worst Auditor General's report I have read, period. The department happily spent three and a half times more on responding to crises than on preventive measures. It spent about \$646 million responding to emergencies, but only \$182 million on preparing for emergencies or on adaptation. Former auditor general Sheila Fraser, when reviewing this issue long ago, said the situation was "unacceptable". Years later, Michael Ferguson did the same audit on the same issue, and said it was "beyond unacceptable". Years after that, current Auditor General Hogan now says that we are decades into the failure to serve indigenous people. Her exact words are, "words are not driving change". This is a problem we see with the government; it is big on announcements but zero on delivery.

For the needed infrastructure for first nations, the dedicated fund's annual amount is \$12 million. There are 112 identified projects that are not funded yet, such as fixing dams, dikes and flood plains. I am sure the government will say not to worry; it is getting to them. Over two-thirds of them are over five years old, and 4% of them are over a decade old. Only \$291 million is required to address all 112 projects. To put it in perspective, in the last two years alone, the government has paid \$88 million directly to Tesla to subsidize wealthy people to buy electric cars, but \$12 million a year is dedicated for infrastructure in first nations communities. We need actions, not words. We need a change of government for this.

• (2125)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Chair, I not only have the fortune of sitting with the member on the public accounts committee and share a city, but I also have the fortune to ask the member an important question.

When we studied the audit presented by the Auditor General in relation to emergency management, we heard the deputy minister, who was invited at that time, admit the fact that there was critical underfunding for the preparedness of indigenous nations in direct relation to how prepared they were for natural disasters. As a matter of fact, the deputy minister even confirmed that she told the minister to spend more money. What did the minister do? She denied it.

I would ask the member to speak to the fact that the deputy minister themselves seems to be doing what is right, but the minister is not. Can he explain why?

• (2130)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Chair, the point he overlooked mentioning is that we actually had to haul the minister into the public accounts committee to discuss the horrible report. I think that was only the third time in the past 100 years that this has been done.

Another thing the member forgot to bring up, and he brought up a lot of excellent points, is that the ministry blamed first nations for a lot of these problems. I remember being aghast. This is the first time we have actually written, in a dissenting report, a call for the deputy ministers, who have been negligent, to be terminated. I still believe that the deputy ministers who have so failed on this report should lose their jobs over this, and that the minister should resign over it as well. It has been disgraceful.

There is \$12 million in permanent money for infrastructure every year, and \$88 million for Tesla. We asked the minister whether there was money in the estimates for addressing this, and her comment was, "Well, aren't you going to vote for us in the budget, then?" It has nothing to do with supporting the budget. There was no money in the estimates, and it is not in the departmental plans either to address this tragedy.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think we almost have quorum here for public accounts, and we could almost hold a meeting here right now. It is an excellent committee because we certainly have the occasion to learn a considerable amount about a number of different departments.

Government Orders

As I mentioned earlier, it was the late Michael Ferguson who really drew the attention of our committee to the chronic underfunding and chronic neglect of the affairs of indigenous peoples. This was, as the minister just said in his remarks, over a number of successive governments. Really, it is not the time and place to be nit-picking about that, but rather we should be talking about what we are going to do in the future.

I am very happy to hear that my hon. colleague from across the way would support an actual increase in funding of infrastructure, so we are going to hold him to that. It will be good to see him voting in that manner in the future. I would like to ask the member whether he would like to comment, in just a high-level approach, on whether it is more efficient for a ministry to come in and basically do for first nations in a very—

An hon. member: Paternalistic.

—paternalistic way, thank you, or, for first nations communities, for there to be a co-operative and organic approach to actually solving this problem in a sustainable way.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Chair, since we have so many members from public accounts, I would like to table a motion.

My colleague from the Liberal side who serves on public accounts with us brought up doing these things with first nations. These projects that have been identified for five years and 10 years were developed in conjunction with the first nations. The 112 projects that have been approved in conjunction with first nations and identified by first nations have not been funded yet. I want to get back to the \$12 million a year in permanent funding. The government built a luxury barn for the Governor General for \$8 million, yet has only \$4 million more for all of these identified projects. The system is broken. I do not blame the member across the way, but I do blame the government for not addressing these issues and trying to politicize them instead of addressing them.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is great to be participating in this debate tonight. We learned so much about the important issues that first nations and indigenous people are bringing forward, so I would like to thank everybody who has participated. I think we need a lot more of that when it comes to working toward reconciliation.

Specifically looking at Indigenous Services and looking at the PBO report and the executive summary, it clearly indicated that the financial resources allocated to providing indigenous services had increased significantly. Look at the money that is being spent. The department had increased its plan of spending from \$9.3 billion in 2018-19 to \$39.6 billion in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Authorities for 2022-23 were \$44.8 billion. I think this is really important because investing money is important. What we also saw was an increase in the number of full-time employees. It went from 4,200 to 7,200.

When we talk about indigenous services, I want to ensure that we are actually not talking about administration but about water, that we are actually talking about the things that are needed for reserves and those people off reserves.

Government Orders

I am taking this opportunity to speak about things that really matter to me as well, not just the boil water advisories. People who have been in this place have shared a lot with me. I would be remiss if I did not talk about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, what I have learned and the importance of the red dress alert; the importance of making sure that, if a young indigenous woman or girl goes missing, we know. We must work together to ensure that this gets done. It is going to take all members but we need to get on board to ensure this amber-like alert is there for murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. That is something we must continue to advocate for and continue to work for.

Just moments ago, I was asking about this. If we want to know about indigenous issues or want to talk about indigenous issues, we need to talk to people who know the facts, the people who are on the ground. People provide me with information when I want to talk about Nunavut. I just learned the most heartbreaking information about the increased rate of suicides. If anyone wants to throw a number out there, they would be disgusted because it would be so low. The rate of suicide for those people who are indigenous or Inuit is 25 times that of Canadians. Come on, everyone, what is so wrong with that? When we look at other issues we know that there has been an increase here or there, but 25 times that of Canadians is just appalling.

To those people in Nunavut, we must do all that we can to ensure that services are there for them. We know that it is not just about the services, but it is years and years of history, of perhaps not having the infrastructure. I know that they have been all named in this place. I do not want to miss anything, so I do not want to list them all off tonight because it is very important. If we are working toward reconciliation, we need to do more about this. We cannot let people die. That is exactly what we are doing on our watch. That is not good enough.

We talk a lot at the status of women committee about mental health. One of the greatest challenges is getting mental health services. Imagine if there were no hospital 20 minutes up the road, but instead people had to jump on maybe a propellor, maybe a boat or something like that. Where do people get their mental health services? Those are the questions being asked by so many of the people living in indigenous areas, who are living in those rural and remote areas. We could do better and we should be doing better.

The government has spent so much money and we have seen no results. It has hired so many people with, once again, fewer results. It has increased bonuses with even fewer results. It shuffles money from one place to another. Please, start getting it right. Indigenous people deserve it.

• (2135)

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I know that when it comes to indigenous services from the federal government, it can feel like a very complex issue, given all the different topics that we have to discuss, be it infrastructure, programs or staffing. No matter what we have seen in all past governments and the current one, it is not necessarily the number of staff in the bureaucracy but the unwillingness of the bureaucracy to devolve decision-making back to first nations, Métis and Inuit that is one of the harshest impacts. Therefore, when it comes to reconciliation, I know how important it is that, when decision-making is being given back to indigenous

peoples, the devolution requires resources that allow indigenous peoples to make decisions about mental health care and about cultural care.

I wonder if the member agrees that when we are ensuring that indigenous peoples are making their own decisions, equivalent resources must be provided so that they can act on those decisions.

• (2140)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, I am looking at my little sticky note that says “her voice”, and her voice is that member for Nunavut's voice. We cannot move forward unless there is reconciliation and we cannot move forward unless indigenous people, Inuit people and Métis people are at the table. Yes, of course this comes with resources. Things do cost money, but, when it comes to spending money, I am such a mother. It is about spending money wisely, and I just fear. I have watched the current government explode with its pocketbooks, but it just does not get us anywhere. I really appreciate the question, but money needs to be spent wisely.

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was listening to the member's speech. I want to, first of all, thank the NDP for initiating this take-note debate today. Given where we are in terms of access to water and clean water, today was a momentous day with the tabling of legislation in this House. Bill C-61 talks about clean drinking water for generations to come. It talks about ensuring that first nations, Inuit and Métis communities have the tools to control water systems and protect the lakes and rivers that they source their water from. It commits investments, ensuring that we do not return to Harper-era cuts, to freshwater systems. It is based on years of consultations and is the process of a co-developed system.

I wonder if the member opposite could comment upon the bill that was tabled today and how it turns the page on the legacy of the previous Conservative government.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, from the movie *Jerry Maguire*, the member had me at clean water. It is that simple. However, let us be honest here. We can sit there and talk about clean water, but we have to get the job done. I know that there has been money announced for Oneida Nation in my region of London, Ontario, but we still know that there is so much more to be done.

In 2015, the current government ran with a plan to make sure that there was water on all first nations. I am sorry, but it has been eight years and we are still seeing a lot of lack.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her very compassionate comments.

Government Orders

The speaker before my colleague talked about driving change and she alluded to some of that in her comments as well. When 99.2% of the executives at level 3 and above, the top 50 executives in the department, are getting performance bonuses, I wonder about a change in the system. How can we measure performance pay, so that we are not paying bonuses to people who are not getting the job done and the organizational goals are not being met and the results are not being met?

I wonder if my colleague would like to comment on how actually creating some accountability in the top levels of the department, right up to the minister, might actually facilitate the driving of change, so that the outcomes and the results for indigenous people across our country are improved.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, part of my concern is with respect to accountability and the current Liberal government. We have not seen the two go along hand in hand for a long time. Absolutely, we need to have that accountability. We need to move forward with first nations. Unfortunately, I just know that with the current government we have not seen that accountability.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre.

I acknowledge all of the work that has been done by the New Democrats for indigenous rights, now and before my time. Jordan's principle emerged out of the work of former MP Jean Crowder's Motion No. 296. This motion was followed by Bill C-249 tabled by former NDP MP Pat Martin in 2008. Both called on the government to immediately adopt a child first principle based on Jordan's principle.

Jordan's principle is now one of the most important programs run by the federal government to uphold its obligations to indigenous children, thanks to the NDP. Bill C-262, introduced by former NDP MP Romeo Saganash in 2016 finally forced the breakthrough that led to the government passing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act in 2021.

New Democrats fought for investments in the last budget, and we secured \$4 billion over seven years for the for indigenous, by indigenous housing program. From the beginning, I knew this amount was not enough. Much more investment is needed. The NDP agreed to the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy, knowing it could make a dent in the current situation. If the NDP did not fight, we would not have gotten anything for housing. When the Liberals and Conservatives will not step up, New Democrats do.

Last week, the Conservatives voted against the supplementary estimates, which included investments for Indigenous Services Canada at \$6.8 billion and investments to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada at \$3.2 billion. These total over \$10 billion in departmental funding that indigenous peoples rely on, which the Conservatives voted to deny.

As for the Liberals, they are not much better. We have heard from the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council that there are massive backlogs at Indigenous Services Canada for issuing status to registrants. This leaves infants waiting 18 to 24 months to get their health benefits. This is absolutely unacceptable.

We hear about the huge backlogs to address Jordan's principle issues. We hear about the backlogs to address payments for services through the non-insured health benefits program. We have heard that Indigenous Services Canada is changing funding formulas for education without even talking to indigenous communities.

Indigenous Services Canada set a goal of 2030 to eliminate the infrastructure gap, but they have no hope of achieving that at current investment levels, as it is a \$349.2-billion first nations infrastructure gap. Indigenous peoples have offered solutions, but they are consistently ignored.

Not only are they making cuts to investments to improve the well-being of indigenous peoples, they are planning to cut staff in their department. According to their website, they anticipate cutting staff by 1,000. Imagine how much worse these backlogs will be. They will keep indigenous peoples marginalized.

Grassy Narrows is still waiting for its mercury care facility, despite repeated assurances from the Liberal government that it would be built. Tataskweyak Cree Nation in Manitoba had students with no school to go to as the school remained closed because it had no heat. It is still waiting for a new school after their roof caved in last month. That school, when it was built originally, was already overcrowded.

There are many more examples across the country. The Liberals love announcements and photo ops, but they disappear when it is time to actually flow the funds that indigenous peoples need. The urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy is one such example. It was announced in 2022, and it was supposed to be released in 2023. It is now December 2023, and we have not seen the release of those funds.

● (2145)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Nunavut. She is a powerhouse not only here in this place but also for indigenous people right across the country.

She made a particularly important intervention in relation to the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing fund, which she has been a champion for. However, there is no question that there have been delays.

Can the member elaborate on ways the government could, through her advice, ensure this program hits the ground and supports the communities most in need?

● (2150)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Uqaqtittiji*, I thank the member for his ongoing support. We were both elected at the same time. I also very much appreciate the great work of the MP for Vancouver East, who has been a great leader in ensuring that these funds eventually get released.

Government Orders

I think the solution is simple. When it comes to the NDP pushing for these funds to be released, the government should just do it and stop giving us excuses for not delivering them. When it makes promises to disburse those funds, it should make sure that it works with indigenous peoples to get them released, because they know what they are doing. They will make sure the funds are spent with accountability and that indigenous people get housed.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, my colleague sits with us on the INAN committee. I would like her to recall that, back in the spring, we were talking to the minister about on-reserve graduation rates. Both the minister and the deputy minister were surprised that, according to their department's results and plans, they were supposed to set a target for grad rates. I do not know if she remembers that conversation, but we were very surprised that neither one of them was aware of this rate that was supposed to be set. There was a lot of confusion in the room.

Finally, they came back and committed to us that there would be a rate set this fall. This was after an expected target for the graduation rate had been promised for two years. This fall, the target they came back with was to improve the graduation rates over and above what they were last year. It took two years to set that as a target.

Graduation rates are a very critical component of success. Could my colleague comment on how the department has failed indigenous kids in the context of not supporting them and not striving to achieve some targets?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, education was used as a genocidal instrument for generations. Residential schools were used to “take the Indian out of the child”. I can still intimately recall horror stories shared with me by former students that happened just for saying a word in Inuktitut. When it comes to education, we need to be careful about what we are saying; education can still be used as a tool to diminish what indigenous peoples can achieve in their lifetime.

Whenever I go to my communities in Nunavut, I always make a point of visiting schools and visiting with students. I encourage students and remind them that they can become healthy, productive adults by making choices. I did not have choices. I was forced to go to post-secondary education. I was told the way I could succeed as an adult was to leave my community, go to a southern institution and become a successful adult. Now I tell students in Nunavut that, if they want to become successful adults, they can be hunters, seamstresses or healers. They can practise their culture and have success as adults.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is such an honour to share a spot with my good friend and colleague from Nunavut in this House for a take-note debate that was called on, once again, by the NDP. The NDP and our indigenous caucus have called on take-note debate after take-note debate, fighting for our right to be a human being in this place that some call Canada.

When I saw the budget estimates by the current government, it reminded me again that this fight is long from over. I did not even see the crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls and gender-diverse peoples mentioned once. What is shameful about this is that the current Prime Minister acknowledged it as a

genocide. It speaks to the normalization of genocide against indigenous women, girls and two-spirit and gender-diverse people in this country. Time and time again, we have to be grateful for the tuppence of incremental justice that has been given by consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments.

I am happy to help push forward, along with families and advocates, a red dress alert system that will help keep us alive should we go missing, should we experience violence. We now have a hope to be found, but we should not end up in that place to begin with. We need the services and support to live in dignity. We need a recognition of the ongoing systemic racism in the wilful underfunding of indigenous people in Canada, which includes the sunset of \$7.6 billion in funding over the next five years.

I have heard from the minister that they are going to replace the funding, that programs ebb and flow, but we know that rates of violence have not decreased. They have increased. We know the number of children in child welfare is at an all-time high. We know that putting kids in care is a pipeline to becoming a murdered and missing adult. With indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse people and men and boys, we know there is a pipeline, yet Jordan's principle, which has made a fundamental difference for children living across this country and has facilitated the ability of indigenous bodies to make decisions about how funding is spent, is being sunset.

It has been over four years since the national inquiry and we have to call for take-note debates so we can respond to one call for justice at a time. Every time we call, how many more women, girls and gender-diverse people have gone murdered and missing?

We should not be ending up in landfills. We know that the very relatives we are searching for right now would not have been there if we had a guaranteed livable basic income, as in call for justice 4.5, had a right to housing facilitated and had proper mental health care, all monies the Liberals will be clawing back with the \$7.6 billion cutback.

We should not be an afterthought. We should not be a midnight take-note debate time and time again. We should not have to fly people across the country to be given the same rights, remembering that indigenous women do not even have the same rights as other women in this country.

I am calling on the government to do right, to make reconciliation not a word but an action. I do not want to hear that word anymore. It is like a swear word to me. The government should show me that it is reconciling through action.

Government Orders

• (2155)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I always appreciate my hon. colleague's comments and feedback. I think it is critical, and I recognize the frustration she expresses. She does that for her people, and I am very grateful that their voice is here in Parliament. I want to thank her for that.

One of the things we are trying to do, based on the suggestion put forward by the member for Winnipeg Centre, is a red dress alert. I am wondering if she could talk about how important that is in the context of what we are talking about today, which is to ensure that we have sustained funding for missing and murdered indigenous women, but particularly for programs that will target and save the lives of indigenous women.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister. I have worked very closely with the minister in the beginning stages of implementing a red dress alert.

However, there cannot be consultations for months and months. This needs to be led and directed by indigenous peoples. We need to be honest about systems that were supposed to protect us that do not; the ongoing systemic racism, for example, in policing. How are we going to set up those systems that are for indigenous, by indigenous people, as my colleagues have called upon, in relation to funding?

Again, the red dress is critical, and I am thankful for the fact that we are getting there, but we need prevention. I should not have to search for places for women who face serious life-and-death violence to find a shelter bed in Winnipeg or treatment for trauma. I should not have to worry that, if I cannot find that one bed, it will cost a life.

This is what that \$7.6 billion means, especially because we are chronically underfunded. That is like \$50 billion, because there is already not enough being invested to ensure that people with indigenous rights are afforded the same human rights as everybody else here. This cannot happen; it will cost lives.

• (2200)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague for her advocacy, her patience and her continual fight for indigenous peoples and their rights.

I want to focus my question on the issue of violence against women within the context of the cuts that would be coming, and there is \$150 million targeted towards shelters.

The member just raised the issue around shelters and the lack of shelters. When indigenous women are trying to flee violence, they need to be able to get to a shelter for safety. Yet, at the same time, the government is looking at cutting \$150 million in shelters. In what universe is this justified? I wonder if the member could comment on that.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. colleague for Vancouver East for her allyship and advocacy, particularly around indigenous housing.

That \$150 million was provided during COVID. Now the excuse is that the government is cutting back the \$150 million in funding,

because it was special funding that was implemented in COVID, even though we know that rates of violence have increased since COVID. How can it justify cutting \$150 million from shelters that are needed for people fleeing violence?

It cannot just be any shelter; it also has to be culturally appropriate. There have to be people there who understand the distinct needs of groups, including indigenous peoples. That cutback is going to cost lives. That cutback is going to take away beds that could mean the difference between a person surviving or not. We are here again talking about a \$7.6-billion cutback because this is a life-and-death matter, and it is such a normalized topic in this place, we barely have an audience.

We are human beings deserving to live with dignity and human rights. That is very simple. We have to stop making excuses. This government needs to stop stalling, doing incremental justice and provide the support that is needed now.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is an honour and a privilege to rise today as part of this important discussion. As has been noted by many, this is a discussion we have had far too often. I have been elected here for about four years, and it seems like we have had this same debate over and over again. The fact that we are continuing to have to do that just shows how the government has failed to address the concerns that have been raised by members of all parties during these discussions. I hope I speak for everyone in saying that we hope to see much quicker action taken to improve Indigenous Services.

Before I go too far, I want to advise that I will be splitting my time with my friend from British Columbia, the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon. Members are looking forward to hearing what he has to say as well.

As I get into my remarks, I want to briefly mention something we have talked about quite a bit in this chamber, and that is the Chiefs of Ontario taking the government to court, alleging that the carbon tax is leaving them worse off and that it is breaching the principles of reconciliation. This is 133 first nations and nearly a third of them are in the district of Kenora in my riding, so I want to echo those concerns, and we certainly hope to see the government move forward to remove this carbon tax and make life more affordable for first nations and for people in northern and remote regions right across the country.

Of course, that is not the direct issue we are debating here today. We are talking about Indigenous Services Canada. I want to thank the NDP for bringing this motion forward, because it is a very important discussion. I represent 42 first nations across three treaty territories in northern Ontario, so this is very near and dear to me and people right across my district.

Government Orders

One of the major concerns I have seen, and I have mentioned it already in debate, is that the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer has shown that despite a dramatic increase in funding from the current government, they have not seen a significant increase in the ability of Indigenous Services Canada to meet the targets it has set. It is spending more, creating more bureaucracy, but not actually having the dollars flow the way they need to go to improve the lives of first nations.

A recent example we see in my riding is in Mishkeegogamang first nation, which is a first nation trying to move forward on an important treatment centre project, something that is badly needed in the community and in the region. It has been able to secure some federal funds for certain steps in terms of feasibility studies and things of that nature, but it has been review after review and more red tape each and every time the government puts up a roadblock. The government has allocated quite a bit of money toward this project, but it is not getting off the ground. The shovels are not in the ground and the people in the community are continuing to struggle without the proper support.

Other members have mentioned a similar case in Grassy Narrows First Nation, which is also in my riding. It is what we see time and time again under the current government: spending money but not getting the results we need to see. That is one of the biggest things that need to change when we talk about the department of Indigenous Services Canada.

We see it with drinking water advisories as well. Despite the government's pledge to end all long-term drinking water advisories on reserve, we know that has not been the case. In fact, according to information from the Indigenous Services website, there are currently 28 drinking water advisories on reserve, 11 of which are located in my northwestern Ontario district of Kenora. Again, funding has been allocated and there have been steps taken in the process, so to speak, but the government has failed to take into account local considerations to be able to get these projects off the ground and ensure that people in remote first nations across northern Ontario can have access to clean drinking water. We hope to see the government move much more quickly and much more directly on that.

With the remaining time I have, I want to briefly talk about an overarching way we can help support self-determination. I believe one of the ultimate ways the government can ensure that indigenous services are properly funded is to offer and provide avenues for more self-determination. We are currently working on a policy, a first nations resource charge, an optional policy that would allow first nations to directly collect revenue rather than having it go to Ottawa and trickle down through the bureaucracy. It is something that would give more control and more power to individual first nations to ensure they have proper services.

I look forward to hearing any questions and comments from my colleagues.

• (2205)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, based on what my colleague said, it sounds like he has a commitment to understanding the importance of supporting indigenous communities across Canada.

I want to ask the member opposite this. His leader, when he was in charge of housing, had a \$300-million first nations housing program that managed to build only 99 houses. Is there more of a commitment to build more housing for indigenous communities? How important is it? I do know that the member opposite comes from an area where there are a lot of indigenous communities and that he has a direct connection and relationship with them.

I would like to hear from the member opposite about his commitment to build more housing for indigenous communities, while making sure that it is also a partnership with all levels of government and communities as well.

• (2210)

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, it is very important. Housing is an issue right across the country. Particularly in our area of northwestern Ontario, there is a housing crisis on first nations. Many communities desperately need to see new housing units developed and, hopefully, more ownership over their housing so that it can be properly maintained.

The member talked about the Leader of the Opposition's time as housing minister and I would remind her that under the previous Conservative government, housing costs were half of what they are now. Unfortunately, the government has created and fuelled a housing crisis. That is something that Conservatives are definitely going to work on when we are in government.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to focus on a troubling narrative I have heard several times from the Conservatives. They begin by stating how unsuccessful the government has been. I agree with that point. It has been unsuccessful in hitting targets. Second, they talk about how funding is the issue related to that. Their third argument on the funding is that it creates big bureaucracies and that these bureaucracies are unattainable. Finally, therefore, those cuts that are in the budget should be sustained.

Harper did that one time too. He brought in the first nations financial accountability act that sought to put accountability on first nations for the little spending that they did, in order to get relief to their communities. First nations across the country revolted against such a preposterous idea. Today, we have the leader of the official opposition, the member for Carleton's new Conservative Party here, rebirthing an old narrative that indigenous people are just bad with money and cannot be trusted.

Will the member commit to the fact that funding for indigenous peoples is in fact deeply underfunding the critical services that are needed and would he advocate for the continued funding of indigenous peoples, particularly the increase of Indigenous Services Canada funding?

Government Orders

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite and the passion he brings to this place. Unfortunately, it seems that he may have misunderstood the comments that I made. I take no issue with the funding itself. I recognize that funding is very necessary for the department, but, unfortunately, we have seen an increase in funding and not a similar increase in the outcomes, the tangible results of that funding. That is where the issue lies. The government has to ensure that these dollars get to the communities that need them, get to the leadership, to ensure that the supports are being funded.

It is not a discussion about more or less. It is a discussion about ensuring that the dollars are getting spent correctly and that the dollars that are getting spent are going to support first nations and indigenous peoples right across the country.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, near the end of his remarks, the member for Kenora outlined possible steps that the Government of Canada could take to reduce red tape and empower first nations. Perhaps the member could just expand on what he believes are tangible, concrete actions we can take to ensure better accountability and better use of money to support indigenous communities?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, an important aspect of this is economic reconciliation. We have to work in partnership with first nations and indigenous peoples across the country to ensure that they have the power and ability to create wealth and to work independently of government so that these nations can provide the proper supports that they need and get the government out of the way to ensure that can get done.

• (2215)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, as the member of Parliament of a riding with 31 bands of Stellat'en, Stó:lo, Nlaka'pamux and Secwépemc peoples, I hear first-hand how the quality of service from Indigenous Services Canada impacts my constituents.

Too often I hear from first nations that ISC is slow-moving and uninformed of their policies, and that government officials lack accountability to the people they are supposed to serve. Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon is no stranger to natural disasters. Major flooding and seasonal wildfires threaten our communities, and in the case of first nations, they are to rely on an office hours away, sometimes in a different region of the province, in Vancouver, to respond to emergencies and assist in recovery.

There are a lot of things I could talk about at length this evening. I had a discussion this afternoon with Chief Leon of Sts'ailes Nation, who particularly noted deficiencies in emergency preparedness, a lack of post-secondary education opportunities for his band members and a failure to meet the housing of indigenous people on reserve, particularly for those who have low incomes.

However, I want to talk tonight about the failures in disaster response and recovery. I will give two quick examples. The 2017 Elephant Hill wildfires destroyed homes, businesses and properties, including those of the Ashcroft Indian Band. An elder and former chief lost his home in that fire and applied for funding under the ISC emergency management assistance program through the band. Funding was granted, and although ISC acknowledges amounts

were assigned to the elder to replace his home, the funding never got to him. He remains homeless six years later.

Where is the accountability? Departments are required to ensure public funds are used in the manner for which they are granted. This is just one example of many that I have heard where ISC washes its hands of financial accountability and fails to ask for financial reports and audits.

There are many examples at Lytton first nation as well. In 2021, B.C.'s atmospheric river nearly wiped out Shackan first nation territory altogether. Indigenous Services Canada is responsible for on-reserve first nation emergency management, unless otherwise explicitly contracted out to the provincial emergency response agencies. While neighbouring municipalities, such as Merritt and Princeton, received prompt evacuation orders, the responsible ISC office in Vancouver did not alert Shackan first nation to the danger when the only bridge to the mainland was severed and the territory was consumed by the river.

It is absolutely ineffective and, I would say, irresponsible for ISC to take responsibility for emergency management without actually being able or equipped to do so. A year later, ISC announced \$900,000 for Shackan first nation and neighbouring reserves impacted by the floods. Where has this money gone? Shackan first nation continues to live in a temporary encampment in Merritt and ask themselves this question every day. ISC should be able to count for not only where funds have gone but whether public funds were used appropriately, according to the terms and conditions in which they were granted.

These concerns are not only mine. They are coming directly from my first nations constituents across different bands and tribal councils. I will note that, before I came to the debate tonight, it was pointed out to me that, in the year 2018-19, there were approximately 4,200 public servants working at the Department of Indigenous Services Canada. That has jumped, today, to over 7,200 employees. My constituents ask me, "When the Government of Canada is spending so much money on bureaucracy in Ottawa, why has the service delivery fallen so short of where it should be?" I cannot answer that question.

I do know that, if the Department of Indigenous Services Canada was cut in half, it would not make any difference to any of my first nations constituents because the department is not accountable, is not doing its job, and is not stepping up to the plate to help the people in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon who have had their lives taken away from them in major disasters over the last number of years.

Government Orders

• (2220)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the member opposite for his contribution to tonight's debate, and I do not doubt his sincerity about addressing the needs of his constituents, particularly the first nations that he represents. I also do not doubt the factual accounting that he outlined tonight about the severe climate events that are plaguing everyone in this country, particularly in his riding.

However, emergency preparedness is critical for all Canadians, particularly for indigenous Canadians suffering from the effects of climate action. There is an emergency management assistance program that is administered by Indigenous Services Canada. There was \$216 million dedicated to that very program in the fall economic statement, which is the same statement that the member and his entire caucus voted against on Thursday and Friday morning. When \$260 million was on the table to support his constituents, why did he not vote for it?

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Chair, I voted no confidence in all the government measures, because I do not believe the NDP-Liberal coalition is capable of running this country in an effective way that can be accountable to indigenous people today. Indeed, there were certain aspects of that fall economic statement, such as emergency management, that are worthy. However, overall, I cannot give confidence anymore to the government in good faith.

That said, I question the ability of the government to even administer large sums of money. The disaster financial assistance program, which was over \$5 billion, largely targeted at my riding and a few surrounding regions of British Columbia, has not been allocated two years later. People are still waiting for their homes and have lost hope.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank the member for what I believe to be a kind of passion for the support of indigenous people. However, it is important to understand that, when we speak of indigenous people, particularly first nations on the west coast, it is a perspective of being a guest, a settler or even a trespasser at times. Does the member recognize that where he is from, where he lives and where he plays, is a place of unceded territory, and that the conditions present for the many nations on the west coast are largely because of an occupation of Canada?

Would the member be clear in his response as to whether he understands the difference between unceded territory and ceded territory? Would he support first nations' call for jurisdiction and rights in relation to those lands, even if they fall in the way of a resource project, at which time they are most important?

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Chair, I am a proud Canadian. I was born in Canada, and I acknowledge the Canadian state. The Crown had signed contracts with many of the first nations that I represent, and the Government of Canada has a duty to uphold the agreements it signed with the first peoples of this land on their traditional territory. This is why I am pleased that our leader, the member for Carleton, has put forward a policy that would allow first nations to shape the direction in which natural resources are developed in the future. They are calling for the rights to those assets, and they should have access to them.

I painted some very bleak pictures, but just the other day, the Leq'á:mel First Nation actually received a settlement of \$75 million. It had fought for over 20 years to receive this, going back to those original agreements that were signed when they were put on reserves in the first place.

We have a ton of work to do, but the words that I spoke tonight were directly informed by my constituents in the Stó:lō territory, the Secwepemc territory and the Stswecem'c territory. I took those words, and I put them in Parliament at their request.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague for his passionate comments.

The member talked about some of the frustrations with Indigenous Services Canada and the growth and ballooning in some of the statistics. One thing I would like him to comment on is the investment in internal services in Indigenous Services Canada, which has increased from \$146 million in 2018 to just under \$300 million in 2023. Could the member speak to the kind of bloated bureaucracy that is here in Ottawa, rather than services out on the ground serving the people that he represents?

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Chair, all government departments are required to make public departmental reports, and they have to outline to all people in Canada where they stand on their own metrics. For Indigenous Services Canada, only 17% of the metrics that it outlined to measure its success were met, which is an absolute failure. This department needs to do better, and it needs to get out of the way.

One comment I hear very frequently is that the ISC rep changes, the first nations do not know who they are talking to and the ISC rep has never even taken the time to meet the leadership of a first nation and build a real relationship. That is not happening, and to me, that is the first step that some of the public servants listening tonight could consider when they engage with my constituents in Mission—Matsqui.

• (2225)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Chair, I said this earlier today and I will say it again. We often find ourselves in this place speaking, sometimes yelling, crying, kicking and screaming. Today, we are here, yet again, to speak about the condition of genocide in Canada, a condition that is pervasive, mysterious at times and one that continues to kill Canadians right across this country.

It harms indigenous nations. It silences them at times of need and, worse, it leaves those who are most vulnerable behind. The kinds of things that we see when we speak of the genocide that we are experiencing in Canada are directly related to things that every single Canadian can relate to: their love of a child, their mom or a grandparent.

Government Orders

Imagining the worst outcomes for them, even for just a moment, can be heartbreaking. Imagine, all those years ago, in 1867, a declaration in this place to usurp the authority, title and lands of indigenous people right across the country, and then being met by hostile wars as this country travelled west, forcing through its railroad.

In the words of Sir John A. MacDonald, he was going to bind this country together with two bands of steel. He forgot to mention that he was going to bring a bunch of guns too.

Along that railroad was the destruction of the bison. It carried with it settlement, residential schools, homophobia and misogyny.

What we have found brought to our lands in the west, in Treaty 6 territory, was a remarkable challenge. We have seen starvation. We have seen disease and we were forced into a position in which, ultimately, Canada would attempt to have us cede the land.

To me, just being a native kid from northern Alberta, how do I find myself in this truth? How do indigenous people across this country find themselves in this truth?

They find themselves in this truth when they are faced with policing that discriminates against them. They are faced with that reality when they are picked up on the street and told they are too poor, so they are going to go to jail. They face that truth when simply trying to feed their families and are told that they are unfit parents and lose access to their children.

This is not a genocide of 100 years ago. This is a genocide of today. That is why it pains me to stand in this place yet again. Where is everyone?

These are words that I will speak time and time and time again, even if Canadians and their MPs, in particular the ones from the Liberal and Conservative benches, will not listen. I will still keep speaking this truth.

It may be politically inconvenient at times but this is the truth we must speak. One thing that is greater than our own partisan games is truth, whether that truth is spoken today or 100 years from now. Our ancestors knew that truth.

They knew that truth, which is why they came together. They came together to speak that truth, to share their reality and to re-open wounds manifested in the truth and reconciliation commission, to which our elders, who were once children, had to recount the memories of being tortured, of seeing little kids try to run away and freezing to death, of seeing their mothers taken advantage of and beaten in the streets.

This is not the Canada Canadians expect. There have always been two great sins in our country. One great sin are the things that we have done to first nations, Métis and Inuit: incarceration, reserves, the shooting of dog teams, the taking away of languages from children.

The other great sin in this country is that it failed to tell Canadians the truth. Members in this place stood up so honourably, claiming the betterment of our people, right under the noses of so many good-willed Canadians who would believe those lies. They would believe that they were doing something good.

We have an opportunity in our country. Poundmaker, a great chief, who was a rebel chief from my place in Alberta and Saskatchewan said that there are but two paths afforded to us, one that looks back and one that looks forward.

● (2230)

Indigenous people are in a place now where we must see how far we have come and know that, although we are bruised, although we bleed and although there are those who may call us weak, we are the exact opposite. We are strong because we have elders to remind us of those stories. We are strong because we have children who remind us of how blessed we are.

To share a quick note of love in this place, I have found serious challenges in being a member of Parliament in here. However, what keeps me going so many times are the words and advice of my elders and of people who are here today. The member for Winnipeg Centre, when I had my first anxiety attack in this place, present with such terrible rhetoric from both the government and the official opposition, said to me that I have a right to joy. What a profound statement that is, and it is a statement that indigenous people far too often never get to hear. It is a statement that, although innocent in its nature, is rooted in a kind of fear and reality that is so present among indigenous people today that they even forget to speak of it.

I want to take an opportunity now to speak about how indigenous people have led the way. Although we are here to talk about Indigenous Services Canada and the lack of support that we see in its programs and services, I want to highlight the strength of indigenous people, who are doing the good work and surviving even without it.

I grew up in a small community in the northeast of Alberta called the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement. It is an indigenous Métis reserve for Métis people in Alberta. It is the only community like it. We are adjoined to federal reserves. The one I am adjoined to is the Frog Lake First Nation. There, I grew up very poor, not knowing whether there was ever going to be anything in the fridge. I grew up not knowing exactly where I would be getting the next opportunity to see my family. I grew up not knowing when I would have the opportunity to see the uncles who are on such a difficult survival trail on their own, or whether I would see the women in my life ever again. However, what I did find in that place, growing up in these communities, was something we do not speak about enough in this place. Given the fact that we have so much poverty, we never mention that we have so much love. We have love in these communities. There were people in my community who had nothing, but who gave me a piece of bannock when my family had none. They were there when my dad was killed on a work site, and they were all there to offer what little they had. That is the kind of love and the kind of community that indigenous people have today.

We are not weak; we are the exact opposite. We are loving, we are kind and we are brave. Even though this place would seek to continue to destroy us, I know that the indigenous people who show up for their community members, who still have nothing, will continue to do so. I have full faith that they will continue to show up for one another.

Government Orders

This is not a speech for the Liberals. It is not a speech for the Conservatives. It is a speech to my fellow Canadians and to my relatives, saying that we are strong and that, although there may be issues we fight today, our ancestors always knew we would be there tomorrow. My commitment to them today, is that they will continue to be there tomorrow.

I want to highlight some of the successes of indigenous people and their strength, bravery and courage. Indigenous people, just last week at the Assembly of First Nations, did something remarkable: They joined the chorus of Canadians, people right across this country, in demanding a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. They are demanding the release of Israeli prisoners, hostages, and also the release of Palestinian prisoners. They are demanding that there be a humanitarian corridor, and they are invoking indigenous solidarity. Although these may seem like only words, they are truly historic, and indigenous nations have not just been cast to the history books; they are still here. We are still here, and we will continue to stand for indigenous people here and right across the globe, now and forever.

• (2235)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the member opposite for his contributions to this House and for his very sincere remarks this evening about his personal and lived experience.

I believe sincerely that on this side of the House we have made progress. However, I know we need to make faster progress and do more with respect to various aspects of reconciliation, particularly with respect to water. We inherited a situation with 105 drinking water advisories and there are now 28.

In the spirit of absolute openness, in my current role and portfolio, we are working on rolling out an indigenous justice strategy to cure the overrepresentation of indigenous communities in the justice system in Canada. I wonder if he could offer me some commentary with respect to his own lived experience and the experience of others with whom he is in contact regarding indigenous experiences in the justice system and how we can cure and improve issues for all Canadians.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for the question, which is sincere in its intent. I hope to offer him a sincere response.

I visited the Edmonton women's penitentiary, the largest penitentiary for women across Canada's Prairies, and what I found in that place after hosting a round table was that the majority of people there are indigenous women. I met a grandmother who, when I asked why she was there, simply said that she was looking for her granddaughter. She was in a desperate situation where she came from in Manitoba. She had lost her granddaughter and had no idea where she was. She was forced to take on the pursuit of justice herself and found herself in Saskatchewan living in poor and rough conditions. She ultimately committed acts of desperation to feed herself while looking for her grandchild.

In addressing the condition of overrepresentation in prisons, we must understand the people we incarcerate and why they are there. If the government were to take the approach in its justice strategy to ask why people are there, it would find that poverty, discrimination

and racism are the root causes of the overrepresentation we see in our prisons. These are good people. They have been cast out by a society that has told them they are not enough, that even though they are breathing, they are not alive and that even though they may stand, they will stand in a prison.

It is time we truly understand that what we are experiencing in Canada is a genocide. When we speak of that, we speak about the loss of those who are incarcerated today. They have lost something. They have had something stolen from them. The original sin cast upon them has manifested into their own harm and that harm is reproducing and duplicating itself. We must address the core issue, which is the harm that has been done to them.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to stand and continue this debate as we look into indigenous services and, in our opinion, the absolute failure of this department in many sectors.

I want to ask the member opposite if he would like to comment more on the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General is "frustrated that almost a decade later, there has been little to no improvement.... Indigenous Services Canada still has not identified which First Nations communities most need support to manage emergencies". She says that if the department did identify these communities, it would target its investments accordingly, which of course, as we have pointed out in this debate, has not been happening.

There are 112 infrastructure projects on the minister's desk that would help first nations leaders stay on their land in the event of an extreme weather event, but the government refuses to move forward to start to improve these conditions. I wonder if the member can comment on that.

• (2240)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Chair, in relation to the Auditor General's report on the immense need for infrastructure and emergency preparedness supports for first nations communities, we found a troubling and disturbing trend. When the initial fund was established, it was modelled off the existing and current natural disaster scheme in Canada, which monitored at that time how frequent they were.

Today, the Auditor General is stating how dramatically different that reality is and how natural disasters due to climate change are being exacerbated. What were once normal storms are now extreme storms. What were once regular floods are now extreme floods. What were once regular fires are now extreme fires. The Auditor General is pointing to this and raising the alarm that first nations, Métis and Inuit communities must be prepared for the disastrous conditions that climate change presents to them, conditions that are not of their own doing but because of others.

Government Orders

I would invite the member to join us in supporting first nations in a fight to ensure they are better prepared for when natural disasters strike. Better yet, I ask him to help us support the fight against climate change, the most important fight to this generation, as it will destroy our planet and all peoples if we do not take it seriously.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Chair, the member's speech made me remember hearing testimony at a House of Commons committee from former chief Joe Alphonse, who talked about the fact that there were serious fires and everyone around them in non-indigenous communities talked to them in a very disrespectful way. Even though they had a significant plan and had worked at a high level to make that plan, these people came into their communities and marked every house on the reserve that had children in it.

I am wondering if the member could talk about how colonial practices continue to harm indigenous communities.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Chair, the story the member for North Island—Powell River mentioned is one that is present across the country, where indigenous knowledge is so often thrown in the garbage as just knowledge these people have, which is irrelevant to natural disasters, and that only science and its very narrow and empirical goals has the tools to address what we are seeing. As a matter of fact, the complete opposite can be true, where traditional knowledge has, for the better part of our country's history, protected North America.

The exact opposite should be happening. Emergency services, governments, police, fire departments, ambulances and those who take care of our people should be fully aware of the skills, traditions and knowledge that we possess because they will often find that this important and life-saving knowledge will not just help indigenous people survive. It will help all people survive. This is the type of relationship indigenous people have been calling for in Canada for a long time, one that genuinely respects the knowledge we hold.

We are a young country. We have only recently welcomed settlers to this place. We must make use of the time we have now, and we must ensure that first nations, Métis and Inuit rights are paramount to our country's present, but more so to our country's future. Our children are watching. We owe it to them.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Chair, Bill C-29 was introduced on the last day of the June 2022 session, which was about the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Bill C-38 was introduced on December 14, 2022, and not revisited until 11 months later, again on the last day of a session. Bill C-53 was introduced on the last day of the session in June of 2023, and today we have the introduction of water legislation, not on the last day but the last week of a session.

Does the member believe that the government is serious about its promise to indigenous people when, at the last moment and at the end of the last four sessions of Parliament, the government chooses to introduce indigenous legislation?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Chair, the member pointed out the terrible and repeated pattern of neglect and delay by the government. It begs the question as to why a government, which touts having the most important relationship with first nations, Métis and

Inuit, does not do the things that would manifest that relationship in a good way.

It troubles me to know that this pattern continues, but it is not one that started with the government. It is one that started 150-odd years ago when the Indian Act was tabled in this place. It usurped the rights of indigenous people and communities and neglected their position of government, jurisdiction and place in this country. The greatest act of reconciliation we can truly have would be to acknowledge that our existing laws directly disadvantage indigenous people, and if we want to make it right, we must listen and recognize that the laws of indigenous people are the laws of this land.

• (2245)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is always an honour to be in this place and speak on behalf of the amazing people of North Island—Powell River. I want to start by recognizing that I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East.

I want to give a special thanks to the NDP indigenous caucus, the member for Winnipeg Centre, the member for Edmonton Griesbach and the amazing member for Nunavut, for their tremendous work on making sure that we keep having these discussions.

I also want to call on all members of this place to remember that this is not an indigenous issue. It is a Canadian issue. Canada was created on a line of colonization and genocide. We continue to see this repeated in our system, because it is the foundation of our system. Until Canada owns that and understands what that means, we are not going to see the changes that we need to see.

We are here tonight to talk about the fact that Indigenous Services Canada is making some significant cuts. I represent a significant number of indigenous people in my riding, and I am very grateful to them. They educate me all the time. When I was thinking about this, a few nations came to mind.

I thought about Ahousaht, which called for a state of emergency because of the number of deaths it was having in its small community. It was seeing significant drug overdoses, and in large part, the deaths in the community were directly related to a lack of supports and programming, which it desperately needs in the area. It has done a tremendous amount of work to bring forward plans, both to the provincial and federal governments, to start to address those issues. However, it is still finding the government slower to react than it would like.

Government Orders

Again, I think this comes back to the issue that my colleague from Winnipeg Centre talked about earlier today. These are matters of life and death. This is not something where we are just saying to be nicer. We are saying that people are dying. They have been dying since the beginning of this country, and they continue to die. When it is a particular group, and we know in this place that it is the indigenous people who continue to have the highest rates of suicide across this country, that is enough for a significant call to action. We are just not seeing the intensity that is needed when responding.

I think of Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k:tles7et'h'; I went to meet with that community recently. It is a very remote community doing some tremendous work. Its members talked about the infrastructure gaps. They are moving towards economic development, but those infrastructure gaps keep being a burden to them in taking that next step.

They also talked about the fact that, as a remote community, they do not see those first responder services. They still have not seen the federal government stand up and say that it is going to be part of them moving forward, so their independence is something that is equal to every other non-indigenous community across this country. This is really about basic human rights.

I think of Dzawada'enuxw, which is another remote community in Kingcome Inlet. The people there do not have a road to get to safety. If there is a storm, they all have to go to the school and wait for helicopters to pick them up. When that many people are being taken in hazardous weather, that is not a good solution; however, they do not get the support they need to make sure that road is there. They are not seeing the federal government step up and make it a priority, as though human safety should not be a priority.

I think of the 'Namgis First Nation, which is doing some tremendous work around language. It has created a language hub. The community is talking about how to bring children into the circle and start them in their own language first, so it is just who they are as they grow up. However, it needs the resources.

In fact, every single nation I just mentioned has talked to me about language, about the fact that they are doing everything they can to fix it. However, they still do not see those supports.

Many years ago, my husband, who went to residential school, made a mask for my son's school. It was called "the Indian in the child". It was a transformation mask, and I hope people understand what that is. On the outside, he had a white face covering a beautiful indigenous face inside. This history is today. My son stood there with his uncle holding that mask for the rest of his school to look at, because he knew that he was the first generation of his family not to go to residential school.

This is happening today, and we need to make it right. Seeing cuts in this country means that we will continue to see this genocide. The government must be held accountable, as every Government of Canada must be held accountable.

● (2250)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. colleague across the aisle, not just for the comments she has made in this debate that we have been having all night, but also for sharing that personal story. It is important that

Canadians continue to hear about the impacts of colonization and the impact that the racism that was directed toward indigenous people of this land has had on many communities.

The bill we are talking about today, Bill C-61, intends to affirm first nations in the way they manage their water system to create tools for first nations to be able to protect the source of their waters. It also has the co-development piece of it, where we would work directly with first nations to get all this work done. It is also important that we continue to collaborate, not just within the communities and the first nations, but also with every level of government and everybody in this House. Maybe my colleague could comment a bit more on that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Chair, I am a little confused by the question. We are not actually here today debating a bill. We are here having a take-note debate, which is something the NDP brought forward because we know that there are going to be significant cuts to Indigenous Services Canada.

Yes, I will always work for clean water. I am happy to talk about the nations in my riding that still struggle with clean water because of the systems that continue to oppress, but the reality is that what we need to see members on the government side understand is that there is unconscious bias that they are allowing to permeate everything that they put forward. That unconscious bias is their responsibility, even if it is unconscious. They must take what is invisible and make it visible, and that is hard. I understand that. At the same time, that is not an excuse.

Hopefully, we will see the current government take it seriously, because we have not seen any government before take it seriously. If this is the most important relationship the Liberals have, I certainly would not want to investigate a relationship with them.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, our wonderful whip, who has been a tremendous ally. I know that there was a bill announcement today. I have to be honest that I find it absolutely bizarre that we are celebrating only 26 boil water advisories, when all the wealth and riches and most of the pollution that is happening to the water are on the backs of indigenous people in resource extraction in this country. The government is patting itself on the back and at the same time violating human rights. It has a million excuses. We are talking about life-and-death matters today, and there does not really seem to be interest in this place when we are talking about life-and-death matters. It certainly tells me that this is not the most important relationship, as the Prime Minister asserted.

I wonder what the hon. colleague thinks about the \$7.6 billion that will be cut over time and what that will look like in her community of North Island—Powell River.

● (2255)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Chair, I think the impact will be actually devastating.

Government Orders

I think of one chief in my riding, from Homalco, who spoke about the fact that there is a bridge in their community where they have lost one life of a young person and another young person made an attempt. They now really watch that bridge to make sure that their children do not hang themselves from it.

These are real-life truths, and it is hard to figure out how people are going to fight one day for their indigenous rights, fight the next day for basic human rights for their people and fight to keep someone alive when those are the options on the table every day for a leader of an indigenous community. The complexity of that needs to be recognized, and I encourage all members to spend time in indigenous communities so they can better understand that reality.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very honoured tonight to enter into this debate. My colleagues from the indigenous caucus from the NDP, the member for Edmonton Griesbach, the member for Winnipeg Centre and the member for Nunavut, have consistently and persistently emphasized, both within and outside our caucus, the importance of justice and basic human rights. When they say this, they mean for all people, and most particularly when they say this, they are talking about indigenous peoples.

I am dismayed. I have been here for eight years. I remember when the Prime Minister was first elected, he stood on the stage and said that there is no relationship more important than the relationship with indigenous peoples in the path toward reconciliation. What do we have to show for it eight years later? What comes to mind are incremental justice, incremental human rights and incremental progress for indigenous peoples, the first peoples of this land. As an immigrant, I came to this place and was allowed to stay by the grace of indigenous peoples, the very first people, Inuit, Métis and first nations people. However, they do not enjoy those rights.

We are still talking about it. Where is the justice in that? I find it so dismaying, because the government will say that we need to address the economy and that we have to ensure we have enough resources to build Canada. We will continually hear the Conservatives say that we cannot afford to do this and we cannot afford to do that. What are we talking about? We are talking about losing supports for a total of 7.6 billion dollars' worth of programming for indigenous services, indigenous peoples.

The government will say that is not a cut and not to say it is a cut. I do not know in what universe one could not describe it as a cut when those existing services will cease to exist when that \$7.6 billion is lost. That equates a cut.

We are talking about Jordan's principle, an important principle that says the health and services of indigenous peoples', no matter where they are, should trump all bickering between levels of government about who is going to pay for what because the health of indigenous peoples comes first. However, we are now talking about cutting supports for Jordan's principle. It is not that Jordan's principle was perfect when it was first implemented. People in Vancouver East consistently have to fight to get those services and battle the bureaucracy to justify those services, and it is not an easy fight.

I think about the government's promise on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry, the national inquiry that

brought me to this place as an ally to fight for that. I was just looking today at a report card on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry from the CBC, which reads:

It's been four years since the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released 231 calls for justice.

Those calls tackled 18 areas needing reform, including education, justice and health.

To date, only two of the 231 calls have been completed — and more than half haven't even been started, according to CBC's analysis.

How is that going for incremental justice? When we talk about incremental justice, what is the fallout? What are the implications? In this instance, we are talking about the lives of indigenous women and girls. This is a travesty in my own community, where right now the RCMP has applied to destroy evidence for cases involving indigenous women and girls. What sort of shameful exercise is that?

• (2300)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member opposite's comments in this House over many years, including in tonight's debate.

I would just point out, for the purposes of tonight's debate, that in terms of long-term boil water advisories, none exist any longer in her home province of British Columbia, which is important. In downtown Vancouver, an area that she represents, we are working with the Squamish Nation to build 3,000 new homes with a \$1.4-billion loan program, which is really critical.

The question that I would put to her is as follows. We have heard in this chamber, particularly from the official opposition, a lot of attacks on a specific issue that affects the community that she represents, attacks on things like harm reduction and safe supply. For a member of Parliament who represents the community that includes the Downtown Eastside, I wonder if the member could comment on that, and how that connects to this debate about indigenous communities and indigenous services in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, we know that when the Conservatives talked about indigenous peoples, indigenous women and girls, and the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls issue, they actually said that it was an "Indian issue", not a Canadian issue. That is shameful. They continue to perpetuate those kinds of beliefs, talking about my riding as "hell on Earth". In fact, what we need is for the government to step up to save lives.

Government Orders

I also want to talk about housing for just a moment. Had it not been for the NDP, budget 2022 would not have had \$4.3 billion directed for indigenous housing: \$4 billion on distinction-based housing and \$300 million for urban, rural and northern housing. Then in budget 2023, we fought again and got another \$4 billion, this time for indigenous, by indigenous, urban, rural and northern indigenous housing. We knew that was not enough, and the government slow-walked the delivery of this. That, too, is unacceptable.

Before we call everybody down about this, I ask the government members to look themselves in the mirror and say, “No more incremental justice. Let us do it, and do it now.”

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, when we are talking about how indigenous peoples are still experiencing genocide, I just want to point out that last week, the Chief Public Health Officer in Nunavut reported that five people died from tuberculosis in the last two years. Tuberculosis is a treatable disease. It is something that does not need to exist anymore in Canada, yet we have had five people in Nunavut die in the last two years.

Can the member explain how this could have happened, based on government policies and the delays, and government making promises and not following through on the promises?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the member for Nunavut raises the exact point. When the government does not take the necessary action to ensure services and supports are in place, to ensure that housing is actually built for urgent, unmet needs, and not just that

but to ensure the basic human rights of indigenous peoples are respected, people die.

TB is spread because of overcrowded housing; that is one of the chief reasons. When my colleague the member for Nunavut and I fought so hard for the government to deliver on that housing, we literally had to cry tears of pain to call on the government to take action. It is not because of me or her, but rather the people in the community whose lives depend on it. It means that much.

In 2022, \$4 billion and another \$4 billion for 2023 is insufficient. Just to put things in context, to address the housing gap that exists for indigenous peoples would cost \$135.1 billion. At the rate we are going, it is going to take some 34 years for us to get there. How many people have to die before that basic human right, whether in a home community or away from a home community, is recognized and respected?

• (2305)

The Chair: It being 11:06, pursuant to order made on Thursday, December 7, 2023, the committee will rise.

(Government Business No. 32 reported)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:06 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, December 11, 2023

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Protecting Young Persons from Exposure to Pornography Act

Bill S-210. Second reading	19813
Mr. Lamoureux	19813
Mr. Villemure	19814
Mr. Van Popta	19815
Mr. Fortin	19816
Mrs. Vecchio	19817
Division on motion deferred	19818

Sitting Suspended

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:42 a.m.) ..	19818
---	-------

Sitting Resumed

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)	19818
--------------------------------------	-------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Affordable Housing and Groceries Act

Mr. MacAulay (for the Minister of Finance)	19818
Bill C-56. Third reading	19818
Mr. Hardie	19818
Mr. Williams	19820
Mr. Desilets	19820
Mr. MacGregor	19820
Mr. Lamoureux	19821
Mr. Williams	19821
Mr. Lamoureux	19823
Ms. Larouche	19823
Mr. Gourde	19824
Mr. Lamoureux	19825
Ms. Larouche	19825
Mr. Fast	19826
Mr. Villemure	19826
Mr. Lamoureux	19827
Mr. Fast	19827
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	19827
Mr. Longfield	19829
Mr. Boulerice	19829
Mr. Blaikie	19829
Mr. Gerretsen	19832
Ms. Gladu	19833
Mr. Desilets	19833
Mr. MacGregor	19834
Mr. Lamoureux	19834

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Reconciliation

Mrs. Atwin	19836
------------------	-------

Season's Greetings

Mr. Bragdon	19836
-------------------	-------

Women Entrepreneurs

Ms. Diab	19836
----------------	-------

Agriculture

Mr. Perron	19836
------------------	-------

Agriculture

Mr. Drouin	19837
------------------	-------

Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame Inductee

Mr. Shields	19837
-------------------	-------

School Food Programs

Ms. Bradford	19837
--------------------	-------

Climate Change

Mr. van Koeverden	19837
-------------------------	-------

Barrie and District Christmas Cheer

Mr. Shipley	19838
-------------------	-------

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency

Mr. Rogers	19838
------------------	-------

Ethics

Mr. Kurek	19838
-----------------	-------

Carbon Tax

Mrs. Gray	19838
-----------------	-------

National Defence

Mrs. Lalonde	19839
--------------------	-------

Local Pharmacy

Ms. Mathysen	19839
--------------------	-------

Rémy Girard

Mr. Champoux	19839
--------------------	-------

Carbon Tax

Mr. Soroka	19839
------------------	-------

Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada

Mr. Lamoureux	19839
---------------------	-------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Housing

Mr. Poilievre	19840
---------------------	-------

Ms. Gould	19840
-----------------	-------

Carbon Pricing

Mr. Poilievre	19840
---------------------	-------

Mrs. Lebouthillier	19840
--------------------------	-------

Mr. Poilievre	19840
---------------------	-------

Ms. Freeland	19840
--------------------	-------

Mr. Poilievre	19840
---------------------	-------

Mr. Fraser	19840
------------------	-------

Mr. Poilievre.....	19841	Mr. Schmale.....	19846
Ms. Gould.....	19841	Ms. Hajdu.....	19846
Dental Care		Climate Change	
Mr. Therrien.....	19841	Mr. Simard.....	19846
Mr. Holland.....	19841	Mr. van Koeverden.....	19846
Mr. Therrien.....	19841	Mr. Simard.....	19846
Mr. Holland.....	19841	Mr. van Koeverden.....	19846
Mr. Davies.....	19841	Mr. Deltell.....	19846
Mr. Holland.....	19841	Mr. Duclos.....	19847
Mr. Boulerice.....	19841	Mr. Deltell.....	19847
Mr. Holland.....	19842	Mr. Champagne.....	19847
Carbon Pricing		Mr. Kram.....	19847
Mr. Scheer.....	19842	Mr. Wilkinson.....	19847
Ms. Hajdu.....	19842	Housing	
Mr. Scheer.....	19842	Mr. Longfield.....	19847
Mr. Wilkinson.....	19842	Mr. Fraser.....	19847
Mr. Zimmer.....	19842	Innovation, Science and Industry	
Mr. Sajjan.....	19842	Mr. Barrett.....	19848
Mr. Zimmer.....	19842	Mr. Champagne.....	19848
Mr. Vandal.....	19842	Mr. Barrett.....	19848
Mr. Berthold.....	19843	Mr. Champagne.....	19848
Mr. Rodriguez.....	19843	Mr. Gourde.....	19848
Mr. Berthold.....	19843	Mr. Champagne.....	19848
Mrs. Lebouthillier.....	19843	Dental Care	
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship		Ms. Jaczek.....	19848
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.....	19843	Mr. Holland.....	19848
Mr. Miller.....	19843	Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.....	19843	Ms. Blaney.....	19849
Mr. Miller.....	19843	Ms. Petitpas Taylor.....	19849
Democratic Institutions		Persons with Disabilities	
Mr. Fortin.....	19843	Mr. Morrice.....	19849
Mr. Rodriguez.....	19843	Ms. Khera.....	19849
Carbon Pricing		ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS	
Mr. Vidal.....	19844	Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Wilkinson.....	19844	Mr. Lamoureux.....	19849
Mr. Vidal.....	19844	Foreign Affairs	
Mr. MacAulay.....	19844	Mr. Oliphant.....	19849
Mr. Viersen.....	19844	First Nations Clean Water Act	
Mr. MacAulay.....	19844	Ms. Hajdu.....	19849
Housing		Bill C-61. Introduction and first reading.....	19849
Ms. Kwan.....	19844	(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed).....	19849
Mr. Fraser.....	19844	Committees of the House	
Foreign Affairs		Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Ms. Mathysen.....	19845	Mr. Blois.....	19850
Ms. Joly.....	19845	Foreign Affairs and International Development	
Ms. Dzerowicz.....	19845	Mr. Ehsassi.....	19850
Mr. Blair.....	19845	Natural Resources	
Carbon Pricing		Mr. Chahal.....	19850
Mr. Melillo.....	19845		
Ms. Sudds.....	19845		
Mr. Melillo.....	19845		
Mr. van Koeverden.....	19845		
Mr. Schmale.....	19846		
Mr. Virani.....	19846		

Justice and Human Rights

Mr. Genuis	19850	Ms. Gazan	19884
Motion for concurrence	19850	Mr. Melillo	19885
Mr. Arya	19854	Mr. Desjarlais	19885
Mr. Angus	19854	Ms. Bérubé	19885
Mr. Ruff	19855	Mr. Viersen	19886
Mr. Lamoureux	19855	Ms. Idlout	19886
Mr. Lamoureux	19855	Mr. Johns	19887
Mr. Kelly	19859	Ms. Larouche	19887
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	19860	Mr. Viersen	19888
Mr. Angus	19860	Ms. Gazan	19888
Mr. Ruff	19861	Ms. Bérubé	19888
Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe	19861	Ms. Idlout	19889
Mrs. Shanahan	19863	Mr. Lamoureux	19889
Mr. Genuis	19864	Mrs. Vecchio	19889
Ms. McPherson	19864	Mr. Johns	19890
Mr. Garon	19864	Ms. Ashton	19890
Ms. McPherson	19865	Mr. Lamoureux	19891
Mr. Genuis	19868	Mr. Vidal	19891
Mr. Lamoureux	19868	Ms. Kayabaga	19891
Mr. Garrison	19868	Mr. Melillo	19893
Mr. Kelly	19868	Ms. Idlout	19893
Mr. McLean	19869	Mr. Desjarlais	19894
Mr. Williamson	19869	Mrs. Shanahan	19894
Mr. Arya	19869	Ms. Larouche	19894
Mr. Ruff	19871	Mr. Schmale	19894
Mr. Genuis	19872	Mr. Desjarlais	19895
Mr. Garrison	19872	Mr. Viersen	19895
Mr. McLean	19872	Mr. Anandasangaree	19896
Mr. Fortin	19872	Mr. Viersen	19896
Mr. Ruff	19873	Mr. Johns	19897
Mr. Garrison	19874	Mr. Desjarlais	19897
Mr. Fortin	19874	Mr. Anandasangaree	19897
Mr. Angus	19875	Mr. Vidal	19899
Mr. Aboultaif	19875	Ms. Gazan	19899
Division on motion deferred	19876	Mrs. Shanahan	19900
		Mr. McCauley	19900
		Mr. Desjarlais	19901
		Mrs. Shanahan	19901
		Mrs. Vecchio	19901
		Ms. Idlout	19902
		Mr. Virani	19902
		Mr. Vidal	19902
		Ms. Idlout	19903
		Mr. Desjarlais	19903
		Mr. Vidal	19904
		Ms. Gazan	19904
		Mr. Anandasangaree	19905
		Ms. Kwan	19905
		Mr. Melillo	19905
		Ms. Kayabaga	19906
		Mr. Desjarlais	19906
		Mr. Vis	19907
		Mr. Vis	19907
		Mr. Virani	19908
		Mr. Desjarlais	19908
		Mr. Vidal	19908
		Mr. Desjarlais	19908

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**Affordable Housing and Groceries Act**

Bill C-56. Third reading	19877
Motion agreed to	19878
(Bill read the third time and passed)	19878

Indigenous Services

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 32, Mr. Chris d'Entremont in the chair)	19878
Ms. Gould	19878
Motion	19878
Mrs. Atwin	19878
Mr. Vidal	19880
Mr. Desjarlais	19881
Mr. Genuis	19881
Mr. Johns	19882
Mr. Aldag	19882
Mr. Vidal	19882
Mr. Lamoureux	19884

Ms. Gazan	19884
Mr. Melillo	19885
Mr. Desjarlais	19885
Ms. Bérubé	19885
Mr. Viersen	19886
Ms. Idlout	19886
Mr. Johns	19887
Ms. Larouche	19887
Mr. Viersen	19888
Ms. Gazan	19888
Ms. Bérubé	19888
Ms. Idlout	19889
Mr. Lamoureux	19889
Mrs. Vecchio	19889
Mr. Johns	19890
Ms. Ashton	19890
Mr. Lamoureux	19891
Mr. Vidal	19891
Ms. Kayabaga	19891
Mr. Melillo	19893
Ms. Idlout	19893
Mr. Desjarlais	19894
Mrs. Shanahan	19894
Ms. Larouche	19894
Mr. Schmale	19894
Mr. Desjarlais	19895
Mr. Viersen	19895
Mr. Anandasangaree	19896
Mr. Viersen	19896
Mr. Johns	19897
Mr. Desjarlais	19897
Mr. Anandasangaree	19897
Mr. Vidal	19899
Ms. Gazan	19899
Mrs. Shanahan	19900
Mr. McCauley	19900
Mr. Desjarlais	19901
Mrs. Shanahan	19901
Mrs. Vecchio	19901
Ms. Idlout	19902
Mr. Virani	19902
Mr. Vidal	19902
Ms. Idlout	19903
Mr. Desjarlais	19903
Mr. Vidal	19904
Ms. Gazan	19904
Mr. Anandasangaree	19905
Ms. Kwan	19905
Mr. Melillo	19905
Ms. Kayabaga	19906
Mr. Desjarlais	19906
Mr. Vis	19907
Mr. Vis	19907
Mr. Virani	19908
Mr. Desjarlais	19908
Mr. Vidal	19908
Mr. Desjarlais	19908

Mr. Virani.....	19910
Mr. Schmale.....	19910
Ms. Blaney.....	19911
Mr. Vidal.....	19911
Ms. Blaney.....	19911
Ms. Kayabaga.....	19912

Ms. Gazan.....	19912
Ms. Kwan.....	19913
Mr. Virani.....	19913
Ms. Idlout.....	19914
(Government Business No. 32 reported).....	19914

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