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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: I understand that the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay is going to be leading us in the national anthem today.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

CANADIAN TRANSPLANT SOCIETY

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 15 years, the Canadian Transplant Society has been at the forefront of organ donation advocacy in Canada, working to eliminate cornea blindness through increased awareness and education.

Cornea blindness impacts adults and children of all ages. It does not discriminate. Currently, an estimated 15,000 Canadians will need cornea transplants in the near future, a number driven by our growing and aging population. The Canadian Transplant Society's goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate cornea blindness by encouraging more Canadians to register their eyes as part of their organ donation pledge. However, to reach its target, it needs support and commitment to education and awareness.

I introduced Bill C-284, to establish a national strategy for eye care to help stop blindness of Canadians. This bill would have a direct, positive impact on Canadians' vision health and support for organizations like the Canadian Transplant Society. Together, we can make a significant impact on reducing cornea blindness in Canada.

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AL FILLMORE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as we in Oshawa mourn the loss of a long-time friend and volunteer, Al Fillmore.

When my daughter first met Al, she believed that he was actually Santa Claus. His white beard and huge smile were a dead giveaway. Whether it was his work at the Legion, the Moose Lodge, or his expertise in recycling medical devices, which he freely gave out to hundreds of patients to help them stay at home, Al's service was a light that was always present in Oshawa.

Al was a person one could always count on to deliver. His gruff exterior and his strong opinions shielded his big heart and his desire to always lend a hand to those who needed it the most.

On September 7, I was honoured to attend his memorial, along with his daughter, granddaughter and his friends from the Redrum first nations motorcycle club where he took his last ride. I thank them for sharing Al with us.

I know Al is resting in the arms of our Creator, and Oshawa's Santa spirit will be remembered by the many lives he touched. God bless.

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• (1405)

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on September 22, we honour the incredible life and legacy of World War II veteran Jim Parks on his 100th birthday.

A true Canadian hero, Jim's contributions to our country and the world are immeasurable. As a young soldier, he bravely landed on Juno Beach during World War II and continued his service with unwavering dedication.

His tireless efforts to educate others about Canada's role in the war through the Royal Canadian Legion's Memory Project and his fundraising for the Juno Beach Centre highlight his lasting impact. Jim's resilience and commitment to sharing history inspire us all. We celebrate not only his century of life, but also his lasting influence on future generations.

I look forward to the Newmarket community coming together on October 16 to celebrate with Mr. Parks.

Congratulations to Jim, and I thank him for his remarkable service to Canada.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***CAFÉ DE RUE SOLIDAIRE DE TERREBONNE**

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to the Café de rue Solidaire de Terrebonne, an extraordinary organization that is celebrating its 20th anniversary. For two decades, the Café has been working to prevent social disengagement and to support vulnerable young people between the ages of 18 and 30 who are at risk of homelessness.

Under the exemplary guidance of its coordinators, Cyndie and Mariette, the Café works with hundreds of young people in Terrebonne who are the first to suffer the consequences of the housing crisis. The Café is also a support network that provides psychosocial counselling, storage services and food assistance, to name only a few. Last year alone, its staff did outreach work on prevention and provided listening services on over 1,000 occasions. Today, as we celebrate this anniversary, we recognize their immense contribution to the Terrebonne community and reaffirm our support for their important mission.

I want to thank the employees of Café de rue Solidaire for the invaluable impact they have had on the lives of our youth in Terrebonne.

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*[English]***NATIONAL PAYROLL WEEK**

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, behind every paycheque there are thousands of Canadians working hard to ensure accuracy and timeliness. I rise today as a proud supporter of all payroll workers, many of whom are women dedicated to the vital role of payroll.

From September 16 to 20, the National Payroll Institute is celebrating National Payroll Week. To mark the occasion, President and CEO Peter Tzanetakis is here in Parliament today.

I thank the hard-working Canadians handling payroll tasks, including the processing of withholding tax, which is essential to our taxation system and the funding of public services.

[Translation]

Through their work, these payroll experts help keep our economy strong and contribute to the financial well-being of workers from coast to coast to coast. They help our government provide the support Canadians need.

I congratulate and thank all those involved in this important work.

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*[English]***PARRY SOUND—MUSKOKA**

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, September marks the end of another stunning summer in Parry Sound—Muskoka, but what is often referred to as the playground of the rich and famous is not the reality for too many of my neighbours. We have master carpenters who build beautiful waterfront cottages, but cannot afford a home in the town they grew up

in. We have resort staff who welcome guests year after year from all over the world, but they are worried about how they are going to heat their home this winter. We have cooks who prepare these incredible meals, but at the end of the month they have to visit a food bank to feed their own family.

These are the folks who call Parry Sound—Muskoka home not just in July and August, but all year. These are the honest, hard-working people who sent me to this place. This summer I heard loud and clear from them that they want change. They need change. They need a government that will let them keep more of their hard-earned paycheque. They want a government that will not punish them for heating their homes and driving to work. They want a government where common sense is just simply common. They are ready today for a Conservative government that will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

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● (1410)

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this parliamentary session begins, I rise to recognize the important work that firefighters did throughout the summer from coast to coast to coast. From protecting our communities to saving people's lives, firefighters are true heroes who put the country's interests ahead of their own. On behalf of the constituents of Vancouver Granville, I want to thank B.C. firefighters and Vancouver's fire rescue services for all they do. Their dedication and courage inspire us all.

Firefighters are vital pillars of our community who safeguard us from the devastating impact of climate change. They are there to save lives in our homes or in public spaces. We know that we can count on their bravery and commitment to protecting Canadians. They show up for us at community barbecues, they are there in our homes and they are always there to make sure that we are okay. That is why we have always been there for our firefighters and why that will never change. From important measures on cancer treatment to unprecedented funding for training and recruitment, we are just getting started.

My thanks to those firefighters.

*Statements by Members***MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL**

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, a beautiful, diverse riding with people of East and Southeast Asian backgrounds, I rise today to extend my warmest wishes to all on the occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival, also known as the Moon Festival, that was celebrated yesterday. For the Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese communities, this festival symbolizes family, gratitude and hope. Across our country and the world, families will gather to share traditional moon-cakes and light lanterns for prosperity and good fortune.

Every culture across the world has an iteration of a harvest festival, whether it be Thanksgiving, Vaisakhi, the Mid-Autumn Festival or Chushu, among many others. These festivals demonstrate our unity and shared human desire to celebrate abundance that the harvest brings.

I wish everyone celebrating in Markham—Unionville and beyond a happy Mid-Autumn Festival.

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[Translation]

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is the point of the “Liberal Bloc”? It serves to keep the Liberals in office.

Do people know that the Bloc Québécois voted to save the Liberals nearly 200 times? Do they know that the Bloc Québécois voted for \$500 billion in inflationary spending to expand the public service by 100,000 employees with Quebeckers' money?

The Bloc needs to stop pretending that it is helping Quebeckers and support us in changing this government. The “Liberal Bloc” is fighting the same fight. Because of the Bloc Québécois, over the past nine years, this government has spent a record amount, failed to balance the budget, doubled the debt and made a mess of public services. The Bloc Québécois is voting to waste Quebeckers' money. The Bloc voted for the largest-ever expansion of the federal government in this country's history.

How did the Prime Minister manage to convince the Bloc to support his government, which is the costliest, the most disastrous and the most centralizing government in Canada's history? The alliance between these two parties remains suspect.

The real question is this: What is the point of the Bloc Québécois? It serves the Liberals.

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[English]

MISSISSAUGA—ERIN MILLS WOMEN'S COUNCIL AND YOUTH COUNCIL TO OTTAWA

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted today to welcome my Mississauga—Erin Mills Women's Council and Youth Council to Ottawa. These brave Canadians are doing phenomenal work engaging with constituents to help me advocate on the issues that matter most to us and ours. Over the past year, they have held events and workshops for health

and wellness, mental health, career development, entrepreneurship, food insecurity and more. All the while, they continue to contribute to our community in their professional, student and volunteer work.

Today, they have brought their advocacy to Ottawa to witness our democracy in action and will meet with officials to share their vision. I want to take this opportunity to thank every member of these councils for their dedication, their leadership and their commitment to our community here in Mississauga—Erin Mills.

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CARBON TAX

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and now time is up.

The NDP leader claims to be a voice of opposition, but for the past two years he has sold out Canadians by supporting the Liberals, who are hiking the tax on our food and doubling housing costs, and who have unleashed crime and chaos on our streets. Following his media stunt, he refuses to state whether the NDP will vote to force a carbon tax election at the next opportunity.

The truth is that the New Democrats have voted for the carbon tax 24 times. They have been part of the Liberal problem. They have been there every step of the way. Canadians need a carbon tax election now to decide between the costly Liberal-NDP coalition, which will hike taxes on our food, punish people who work and take their money, or a common-sense Conservative government that will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

Let us bring it home.

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● (1415)

CARBON TAX

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up.

Canadians are fed up with the corruption, self-dealings and conflicts that define the rotten Liberal government. The latest example is the Prime Minister's decision to hire carbon tax Carney as his economic adviser, conveniently employing him through the Liberal Party to avoid conflict of interest disclosures.

Every day, there are new questions about conflicts surrounding carbon tax Carney. Just yesterday, we learned that carbon tax Carney is negotiating with the very Liberal government he is supposed to be advising in funnelling 10 billion taxpayer dollars to an investment fund owned by his company, Brookfield. This is an outrageous abuse.

That is enough of the Liberal corruption. Canadians deserve a carbon tax election, and they deserve one now.

While Canadians struggle to put food on the table, it has never been better to be a well-connected Liberal. It is time to come clean. How much does carbon tax Carney and his firm at Brookfield pocket in management fees from taxpayers in this new fund? If the Liberals do not plan on answering us, I am sure the Ethics Commissioner can shed some light on the brazen corruption of Canada's unelected finance minister, who is gunning for the PM's job. In the meantime, they get rich and Canadians get fleeced.

* * *

• (1425)

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Phil Fontaine, one of the greatest indigenous leaders in Canadian history, will be celebrating his 80th birthday. He rose from poverty and the cruelty of residential schools to challenge discrimination and colonialism at the highest levels of political and religious power.

As national chief, Phil Fontaine attained apologies from both our Parliament and the Vatican for their destructive treatment of indigenous children and played a key role in negotiating the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Under his leadership, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission paved the way for a national dialogue on healing and justice. Fontaine helped to reshape how Canada confronts its past, promoting understanding, respect and mutual recognition.

His legacy will be the inspiration for a new generation to continue the reconciliation journey toward a fair and inclusive future for all Canadians. I invite the House to join me in honouring Phil Fontaine's lifetime of service and achievement.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we just found out that the Bloc Québécois is going to vote to keep the most costly and centralizing Prime Minister in power. This government has doubled the cost of housing and the national debt. It taxed food, punished workers and broke our immigration system, pushing Quebec to the breaking point.

How can the Bloc Québécois abandon Quebecers to support the most costly and centralizing Prime Minister in our country's history?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see that the Leader of the Opposition is concerned only about his own political interests and not the interests of Canadians or Quebecers. That is why we will continue to invest in Canadians. We will continue to be there for Quebecers by implementing the dental care program and by ensuring that there are more child care spaces. We will be there to invest instead of pushing for austerity and budget cuts, like the Conservative leader would do for everybody, as we well know.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is in Canadians' best interests to axe the tax, build the

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homes, fix the budget and stop the crime, so that Quebecers can get bigger paycheques and pensions to buy food and have access to affordable housing in safe communities. That is what we need after nine years of the "Liberal Bloc", which doubled the cost of housing, doubled the debt and broke our immigration system.

Why is the Bloc Québécois voting against Quebec and in favour of this centralizing Liberal Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are seeing that the Conservative leader is great on slogans and believes in slogans, but he does not believe in Canadians and Quebecers. He does not want to invest to help people get dental care. He does not want to be there to help seniors and young people. He is there to cut programs. He is there to fight against climate action and against putting money into the pockets of Canadians who need it. He has nothing to offer. He is obsessed with his own thirst for power.

We are obsessed with Quebecers and Canadians and what we can do for them.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader sold out Canadians to sign on to a costly coalition that doubled the debt, doubled the housing costs and sent two million people to food banks and 1,800 to tent encampments. He voted 24 times for the carbon tax. Since he did his dramatic video, he has refused to answer 40 times whether he would vote non-confidence. Now that he knows that the Bloc is going to keep the Liberals in power, he will stand up and claim that he is voting against. Why will the NDP not stand up when it counts so that we can end this costly coalition and elect a common-sense government?

The Speaker: Before the Prime Minister takes the floor, I am going to ask the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby to only take the microphone when recognized.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see that the Leader of the Opposition enjoys his political games and enjoys chasing after his own political interests; however, he does not have a second to care about Canadians' interests. He is actually in a bad mood because inflation has come down for Canadians. He does not care about their interests. That is why we are going to continue to deliver for Canadians. We are going to continue to step up with investments that are going to support Canadians as we fight climate change and build a brighter future for everyone.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of this costly NDP carbon tax coalition, what has happened? What is up? Taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up. What Canadians need is hope. They can choose a common-sense government that axes taxes, builds homes, fixes the budget and stops the crime, so they can earn powerful paycheques and pensions that buy affordable food, gas and homes in safe neighbourhoods protected by a strong military. Why can we not bring it home now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that little performance shows just how much the Leader of the Opposition loves his slogans but does not actually put forward any—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to ask members, as I had asked a previous member before, to please not take the floor unless they are recognized. I will ask the right hon. Prime Minister to start from the top.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we point out the performance of the Leader of the Opposition, and his colleagues get all upset because they know that he does not actually care about Canadians. He does not care about the programs we are delivering. He does not care about stepping up to support Canadians. He is actually in a bad mood because inflation has come down to 2% and it ruins his little “Justinflation” slogan. He is so upset because he cares about his own interests and not the interests of Canadians. We are going to stay focused on the things that matter for people while he spins little rhymes and tosses out his slogans. We will take this seriously, as we always have.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the “Justinflation” tag line works now better than ever. He can try to call himself Rocky Balboa and play fight songs to aggrandize himself as the star, but the people lined up at food banks, two million of them every month, know better. The people who are living in the 1,800 Ontario tent encampments know better. In the 35 homeless encampments in Halifax, the people there know better. They know that we need to fire this costly carbon tax coalition so we can elect a common-sense government that will bring it home for them.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he sure loves to declaim about vulnerable people and perform his supposed empathetic concern, but the reality is he is using vulnerable people for his own political gains. If he actually cared about people, he would not have voted against dental care for 700,000 seniors; he would not have voted against a school food policy that is helping families with 800 dollars' worth of groceries a year. He is not making the investments in Canadians. He wants to cut programs and make Canadians suffer, so he can sit in the big chair.

* * *

[Translation]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appointed a special representative on combatting Islamophobia. Ms. Elghawaby felt that her mandate allowed her to accuse Quebec universities of not protecting what she

called “the safety of students”. Maybe the concept of Islamophobia means different things to different people. Some people even say it is simply an instrument of liberal political activism.

For our general edification, I would like to know how the Prime Minister defines Islamophobia.

• (1435)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized the rise in intolerance of all kinds across the country. We have a duty to identify, recognize, and fight such intolerance. That is why we appointed a special representative on combatting Islamophobia. We have a special representative for combatting anti-Semitism. Unlike the Bloc Québécois, we recognize the existence of systemic discrimination within all of our institutions.

We must recognize the challenges so that we can bring Canadians together, recognize the challenges we face, and work together to create a country that is more peaceful and more respectful than it is now.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is no small matter. The Prime Minister does not know the definition of Islamophobia.

Without a definition, does he believe that criticizing Quebec universities is likely to reduce Islamophobia, whatever that might be, or will it instead pit Canadians against Quebecers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, I am a proud Quebecer. I am proud that the Liberal Party of Canada has more members from Quebec than the Bloc Québécois.

We are proud Quebecers, and we know that, in every province and in every institution across the country, we have systemic racism and discrimination challenges we must address.

That is the work we are doing because we know that everyone needs to feel included and respected within our country. Unfortunately, intolerance is on the rise across the country. It is incumbent upon all of us to bring people together and listen to each other.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative governments across the country are privatizing our health care. They want to make people pay to see a doctor. It is no different in Quebec.

Oral Questions

However, this Prime Minister is too weak to stand up to the Conservatives. People are paying the price. What will it take for him to get a backbone and defend the principles of public, universal health care?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the NDP cares about progressive values across the country, but it cannot get the job done.

We were very happy to work with the NDP to do meaningful things for the health care systems, child care, for Canadians, but, unfortunately, they are the ones who are afraid of the Conservatives. They are the ones who decided to stop working for Canadians.

It is not always easy to put forward progressive policies, but we are determined to continue to do that. We will continue to defend our public health care system. We will continue to invest in Canadians.

Unfortunately, the NDP cannot say the same.

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[English]

GROCERY INDUSTRY

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are failing on health care, and they are failing on groceries. One year ago today, the Liberals met with Canada's grocery CEOs and promised to stabilize prices. A year later, prices are still up, and grocery CEOs are still gouging families struggling to put food on the table.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives remain silent on grocery greed; they want to give even more taxpayer money to the CEOs. Canadians are fed up. They are working harder and falling farther behind.

Why does the Prime Minister keep caving to CEOs while Canadians pay the price?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the NDP is taking a page out of the Conservative playbook and choosing slogans rather than doing the hard work that will actually help Canadians.

We have delivered some of the most comprehensive reforms to the Competition Act in order to hold big grocers accountable for the work that they are doing in terms of delivering for Canadians. We have also moved forward on a national school food program that is putting more food in the bellies of 400,000 kids across the country as provinces come on board, and it is going to save parents up to \$800 on their grocery bills.

These are tangible things that we are busy delivering while the Conservatives are playing politics.

* * *

● (1440)

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 2014, The New York Times put out "Life in Canada, Home of the World's Most Affluent Middle Class".

Today, almost a decade after the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister has been in what he calls the "big chair", Canada's GDP per capita is actually down, while the American one is up 19%. His carbon taxes are strangling growth.

How could the solution possibly be to quadruple the tax to 61¢ a litre and send more jobs and businesses south?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the Leader of the Opposition does not believe in climate change and does not believe in putting more money in the pockets of Canadians with a Canada carbon rebate.

How many wildfires, hurricanes and droughts are going to go after Canadians' lives and livelihoods before he understands we cannot have a plan for the economy unless we have a plan for the environment?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not have a plan for either, as evidenced by the fact that he came completely unglued on a radio station the other day. He started spitting out personal insults and crying "liar, liar, liar" when he learned I had pointed to the government's report. It showed that the carbon tax will blow a \$25-billion to \$30-billion hole in our GDP. This was from a report the government tabled in the House of Commons.

If, in fact, the government is lying about the true cost of the carbon tax to our economy, then what is the true cost?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer demonstrated that eight out of 10 Canadian families do better with the Canada carbon rebate every three months over the cost of the price on pollution. On top of that, Canadians know the price on pollution has brought down our emissions faster than has happened in any other G7 country; at the same time, it is supporting Canadians in the middle class and those working hard to join it.

We are going to continue to fight climate change and invest in a strong economy for the future while the Leader of the Opposition continues to deny climate change and cut programs and services that Canadians rely on.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, someone cannot sit in the big chair if they cannot read their own government documents.

Oral Questions

Environment and Climate Change Canada's carbon pollution pricing data, tabled in the House by the government, said that it will cost between \$25 billion and \$30 billion in lost GDP when the tax is implemented. A further document tabled by the environment minister on carbon tax 2 says there will be another \$9-billion hole, for a total of between \$34 billion and \$40 billion. Now he screams that this is all lies.

Again, if the government documents are lying, what is the true cost of the carbon tax to our economy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian, except perhaps the Canadians in the Conservative Party of Canada, understands that the costs of inaction on climate change will be catastrophic, not just with wildfires, droughts, floods and hurricanes, but with lost economic opportunity, lost jobs and lost growth for Canadians as we solve the challenges of the 21st century.

We are choosing to invest in a strong economy for the future. We are choosing to fight climate change and develop the solutions that the world is going to need, while the leader of the opposition offers a do-nothing climate change plan that will cost Canadians billions.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's carbon tax has not stopped a single flood or single fire in this country. He has not stopped any natural disasters. What he has done is driven Canadians into poverty. Quadrupling the tax to 61¢ a litre will cause a nuclear winter for our economy, something that his carbon tax coalition partners in the NDP have voted to bring about.

If he really is so confident in a 61¢-a-litre tax, why does he not call a carbon tax election and let Canadians decide?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Leader of the Opposition is that he believes in slogans; he just does not believe in climate change.

The fact is, our plan to fight climate change is not just putting more money in the pockets of eight out of 10 Canadians across the country, but is bringing down emissions and creating jobs and opportunity for Canadians for generations to come. His climate change denialism, his do-nothing plan to fight climate change, is going to hurt Canadians.

We are going to continue to build a strong economy for the future because we know that fighting climate change is part of it.

• (1445)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not fighting climate change. He is driving production out of Canada to more polluting foreign jurisdictions rather than using our common-sense plan to green-light green projects that produce more energy around the world and displace emissions. That is a common-sense approach.

The Prime Minister will still not answer the question on the full cost of his two carbon taxes. I have cited government documents tabled in the House that say that they will total between \$34 billion and \$40 billion per year in lost GDP and jobs. If his government documents are wrong, then what is the true loss of GDP as a result of his 61¢-a-litre carbon tax?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about driving investment out of Canada. He must be remembering his own time as minister, because since 2016, foreign direct investment is up 60% in this country. Last year, we were third in the world after the U.S. and Brazil, which makes us number one for foreign investment in the G20 per capita.

The reality is, we are continuing to show the world that it can have confidence in Canada and in Canadians. Why does he not have confidence in Canadians? Why will he not invest in Canada?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deputy governor of the Bank of Canada said of Canada's investment problems, "In emergency, break glass".

Canadian workers get 55¢ of investment for every dollar American workers get and only 65¢ for every dollar that an OECD worker gets. The gap between the Canadian and U.S. economy is now at a 100-year high after nine years of the NDP-Liberals.

I will ask this one last time. The Prime Minister's own documents show that his 61¢-a-litre carbon tax will blow a \$40-billion hole in our economy. If that number is not right, what is the real number?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we see that the Leader of the Opposition is frustrated that international economists, climate experts and academics all back our plan to both fight climate change and grow a strong economy, while he is stuck with late-night, far-right conspiracy YouTube videos.

The reality is, we are delivering concretely to build a stronger future for Canadians, to fight climate change and to grow the economy, while he is hiding his head in the sand and even refusing to admit that climate change is real.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a motion that was unanimously adopted by the Quebec National Assembly:

THAT the National Assembly recall that education is under the Québec government's exclusive jurisdiction; THAT it affirm that recruitment of faculty in higher education institutions should be based on excellence and competence, and definitely not on religion; THAT it reiterate that recruiting faculty on the basis of religion is not only discriminatory, but also contrary to the State's principle of secularism; ...THAT it also recall that Amira Elghawaby made insulting remarks about the Québec nation by calling it racist; THAT, lastly, the National Assembly reiterate its 31 January 2023 call for the resignation of Amira Elghawaby.

Where does the Prime Minister stand on this?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. Universities must hire the best people for the jobs that need to be filled. They have a responsibility to do so. However, we also recognize that universities have policies in place to ensure that their employees reflect the diversity of the communities in which they operate.

I have every confidence in our universities, and we must always continue to guard against systemic discrimination in all institutions across this country.

• (1450)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does it take nine years to learn not to answer questions?

The Quebec National Assembly unanimously declared that this federal employee has insulted all of us and it wants her to resign.

I am asking the Prime Minister whether he is taking Ms. Elghawaby's side against Quebec, or siding with the Quebec National Assembly. All of them are elected members of the National Assembly of Quebec, which he is not. He should make up his mind.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to suggest in this place that a member from Quebec, elected by Quebecers, does not represent the voice of his constituents is an insult to everyone here. The Bloc Québécois, elected to be here in Ottawa, should be ashamed for making those comments.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from 2000 to 2014, Canadians attracted \$30 billion to \$100 billion more in American investment than the reverse. In the last nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, 450 billion more Canadian dollars were invested in the U.S. than were returned. That is Canadian money building U.S. pipelines and U.S. mines, and U.S. businesses paying American workers with Canadian money. That is the consequence of a high carbon tax and a high energy price, which drive jobs away.

When will the Prime Minister learn that his radical plan to hike the tax to 61¢ a litre will destroy our economy further?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem with that argument is that the Leader of the Opposi-

tion does not understand that the International Monetary Fund and others have projected Canada to have stronger growth than the United States next year, despite the fact that we have a price on pollution, or perhaps because of the fact that we have a price on pollution. It is drawing in investment from around the world in the growing sectors of the economy to ensure good jobs in mining, in environmental research and in various industries, because we know the future is greener.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our per capita GDP is smaller than it was 10 years ago. It is perhaps the first time since the Great Depression that that has happened. The Prime Minister has had the worst economic growth since the Depression. The OECD says that Canada will have the worst economic growth this year and for the next three decades.

Our economy has dropped more per capita since before COVID than any other G7 country. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. The Prime Minister wants to quadruple the carbon tax to 61¢ a litre, which would be an economic catastrophe for this country.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what that little performance just showed is that the Leader of the Opposition is using his brokenist argument around Canada to explain why he would cut dental programs, cut child care, step away from any climate action and withdraw support to draw in investment. That is his excuse. The problem with that argument, however, is that Canada actually has the strongest fiscal position of any of the world's advanced economies. Our choice is putting that strong fiscal position in service of investment in dental care, in child care, in pharma, in Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there the Prime Minister goes again, telling Canadians they have never had it so good. It has never been so good for those two million people lined up at food banks and for the one million people every month who go to food banks in Ontario. There are record-smashing increases in homelessness. By his own admission, after he promised a food program that has not delivered a single meal despite millions spent on bureaucracy, one in four kids lines up at food banks.

Now here is the worst: He proposes to quadruple the carbon taxes on heat, housing, fuel and food. How much will that take from our GDP?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem the member has is that he cannot admit that the price on pollution puts more money back in the pockets of Canadians in the middle class and those working hard to join it. He continues to spew the line that Canada is broken, and whenever I point out that we have a strong fiscal balance sheet that we should be putting in service of programs and supports for Canadians, he says, no, we need cuts. That is not the path forward for Canada, and that is the choice Canadians get to make. Do we go with austerity and cuts to programs, or do we invest in Canadians and their future?

• (1455)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who cannot eat or heat and house themselves are living in austerity now, and as to the Prime Minister's false PMO talking point about eight out of 10 Canadians being better off, it conveniently excludes the \$25 billion per year in economic costs that his own government admits the carbon tax imposes on Canadians. That is why six in 10 Canadian families and 100% of the middle class are worse off with his carbon tax.

His documents show that Canadians are worse off. If he does not have confidence in his own government documents, how can this House have confidence in his government?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, millions of Canadians across the country have received the Canada carbon rebate cheques, which put more money in their pockets every three months than the price on pollution costs them, on average. That not only allows us to fight climate change and boost our economy in strong ways that create the innovative solutions the world is going to increasingly rely on, but helps Canadians with affordability at a challenging time.

The member would eliminate those Canada carbon rebate cheques and puts forward no plan to fight climate change. That is not how we build a future for Canada.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the Liberals, housing prices in Winnipeg are out of control. The average rent for a one-bedroom suite in Winnipeg has increased over 22% since last year, the largest jump in the country. Corporate landlords are buying up affordable housing and jacking up rents because they know they have the support of both the Liberals and the Conservatives. I can tell them one thing: They are not the answer to our housing crisis.

My question for the Prime Minister is this: Why is he allowing corporate landlords to price people out of their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much look forward to working with the NDP Premier of Manitoba on a renters bill of rights. We just presented a number of measures that will directly help renters, like ensuring that rent is counted toward the calculation of credit scores so people can get a mortgage and protecting renters from landlords. We recognize, as I am sure the NDP does, that that is largely in provincial jurisdiction, but I am very glad to hear that the NDP Premier of Manitoba will

be stepping up to work with the federal government on delivering for Canadians in Manitoba and indeed right across the country.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is not in provincial jurisdiction is what is happening in Edmonton Griesbach. The federal government is set to bulldoze hundreds of homes in my community so that developers can get rich. These homes are on public land and are some of the last affordable units in my city due to decades of Liberal and Conservative cuts. Kim, a single mom raising a child with a disability, is scared she will be homeless.

Will the Prime Minister stop the demovictions, stop selling off land to rich developers and build homes that people can actually afford?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has put forward one of the most ambitious investments in housing this country has ever seen.

We are happy to work hand in hand with the NDP to make sure that public lands get used for affordable housing. We are doing everything we can to push back against provinces that are attacking public affordability of homes. We would very much like to continue working with the NDP on this matter. However, the NDP is choosing to play politics with the Conservatives and put politics first.

We are going to continue to work to make sure that the member's residents in Edmonton Griesbach and, indeed, right across the country get better affordability and better homes because that is what this federal government is focused on, not politics.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Justice revealed that Russia is funnelling money to Conservative media figures to push its far-right propaganda. This is a clear threat to our democracy and Canada's national security, yet the leader of the Conservative Party—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1500)

The Speaker: I would ask all hon. members, on both sides of the House, to please not speak out of turn so that we can hear the question that is being asked.

Oral Questions

I would invite the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands to start from the top so that the Speaker can hear the question. I would ask all other members to please hold their comments.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Justice revealed that Russia is funnelling money to Conservative media figures to push a far-right propaganda. This is a clear threat to our democracy and Canada's national security, yet the leader of the Conservative Party is directing his MPs to block the public safety committee's study on this real issue.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House what our government is doing to protect Canadians from this very real threat of foreign interference?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his advocacy on this unbelievably important issue.

It is extremely alarming that Russia is pushing its propaganda in our democracy, but it is even more appalling that it is using far-right Canadian Conservative influencers to divide Canadians. We must all stand against this.

I call on all parties, including the Conservative Party of Canada, to stand up to investigate these allegations and follow up on them. Let it get through committee.

* * *

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister, housing costs have doubled. He said he was going to create a \$4-billion fund to give to cities to speed up home building. He gave Toronto city hall a half a billion. What did it do? It hiked building taxes by 42%. He gave Ottawa city hall \$200 million so that it could hike taxes by 11%. He gave Mississauga city hall \$113 million so it could hike taxes by 22%.

Why does the Prime Minister keep funding bloated local government gatekeepers that block housing rather than building the homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us not take any lessons from that failed Harper housing minister, who did not get anything built while he was on the job. We are going to continue to do what he did not, which is working with cities, working with provinces and territories, and working with non-profits to get homes built.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they are not being built. In fact, housing construction is down, way down.

The Prime Minister should take lessons from everyone because, after nine years in power, he has the worst housing inflation in Canadian history and by far the worst housing inflation in the G7, and now he is bloating up the same bureaucracies that have given us the slowest building permits in the G7.

Why will the Prime Minister not follow my common-sense plan to link federal dollars to housing completions to incentivize local

governments to speed up permits, free up land and actually cut building taxes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's so-called housing plan was universally panned by experts, which is why it failed in the House of Commons.

The reality is that we have been working with premiers, working with municipalities and working with non-profits to turn the ship around, which he neglected when he was the so-called housing minister.

The reality is that we are delivering for Canadians. We have a lot more work to do, and the Leader of the Opposition's slogans and divisive attacks are not going to get any homes built for anyone.

• (1505)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was housing minister, the average home price was \$450,000. The rent was \$950 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,100 for a two-bedroom unit. It has now doubled to over \$2,000. As well, we built almost 200,000 homes at rock-bottom, low prices. Now, fast-forward a decade, and 28% of Canadians told a RE/MAX survey that they are considering leaving the country because of housing inflation doubling under the Prime Minister. Why does he not get his gatekeepers out of the way and follow my common-sense plan to build the homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like so many of his plans, his plan consists entirely of slogans and personal attacks on me, on mayors and on Canadians who are working to get things done.

We are investing. We are in partnership with municipalities to change zoning laws, to invest in public lands and to support non-profits to build more units. I was just in Vancouver meeting with the extraordinary folks of the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation who are delivering a unit that a young woman can now live in and afford because of investments this federal government has delivered.

We are going to be there for Canadians, while the Leader of the Opposition is there for himself.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, a woman was stabbed near the La Maison Benoît Labre hard drug injection site, next to an elementary school.

Oral Questions

This tragedy could have been avoided if the Prime Minister had agreed to my request about three months ago to close the hard drug injection site and invest in treatment for drug addiction.

Will the Prime Minister finally close this hard drug injection site next to a school?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians deserve to live in safe communities, and that is a responsibility we will always take seriously.

Taking this type of challenge seriously means listening to experts and those working on the front lines to address the challenge of opioids and toxic drugs in order to help people get through times like these.

Yes, we need to invest in helping these people. We also need to invest in ways to protect Canadians. We will base our decisions on science and evidence, not on ideology and politics.

* * *

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the Prime Minister to remind me of the dates when he held a seat in the Quebec National Assembly. I was not around for that.

That being said, if he and all the parties here want to fight Islamophobia and polarization, they should consider passing the bill introduced by the Bloc Québécois, which prohibits or puts an end to the religious exception and religious pretexts when it comes to hate propaganda and inciting violence.

Will the Prime Minister do that before he is sent packing?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois is doubling down.

The reality is that he just very clearly stated that federal MPs from Quebec have less legitimacy than members of the Quebec National Assembly.

That leads me to wonder what the hell the members of the Bloc Québécois are doing here if they have no legitimacy to speak for Quebec?

The Speaker: I would ask the Prime Minister to withdraw the word that is not parliamentary and use other words to express his opinion. He has 10 seconds left to respond.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we are very clear. We are here to defend the interests of Quebec in Ottawa, at the federal level. I am not sure what he is doing here if he does not believe he has the legitimacy to speak for Quebec.

The Speaker: Before we go on, we must settle an important matter. I asked the Prime Minister to withdraw the word that was unparliamentary.

• (1510)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the bad word.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Prime Minister wishes to add something.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, it was not a bad word. It was a different word, but I withdraw it too.

The Speaker: I thank the right hon. Prime Minister.

The hon. member for Beloil—Chambly.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, either I was unclear, or Mr. Trudeau himself is living proof—

The Speaker: I know that the hon. member for Beloil—Chambly has a lot of experience and he clearly made a mistake, but I invite him to ask his question again and respect the rules of the House.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the bad word.

The Prime Minister is living proof that some Quebeckers need to work on their French, because he did not understand what I said. I hope Parliament studies and passes the bill that would prohibit the religious exception. He is an elected member from Quebec, but in Ottawa, so he should reflect the will of Quebec in that capacity.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in our federal system and in our federation, the reality is that we can have elected members in Quebec City to represent Quebec, and we can have elected members in Ottawa to represent Quebec and all other Canadians too. I will continue to do my job as a proud Quebecker to defend the interests of my constituents in Papineau, and I will always be there to make the entire country's interests a priority.

* * *

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, children “are not able to buy alcohol, they are not able to buy marijuana [or] cigarettes, but they can have access to crack pipes and kits to be able to do safe injection? It’s just wrong.” These are the words of the stepfather of Brianna MacDonald, the 13-year-old girl who lost her life to a drug overdose in Abbotsford after she was denied treatment but offered drug paraphernalia by the authorities.

When will the Prime Minister end this radical agenda, close the drug dens, defund unsafe supply and treat addiction to bring our loved ones home drug-free?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tragedies like that are unthinkable, and we need to do everything we can, as orders of government, to bring them to an end, to protect kids, to protect communities and to protect vulnerable people. That is why we work hand in hand with local authorities and with provincial authorities on the plans that will suit them, that will keep communities safe.

We know there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. We know that ideology is not the answer. Only the application of science, of compassion and of investments will help people through this terrible epidemic.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this young girl's family begged the hospital for treatment for their vulnerable teenager. Instead, she was given drug paraphernalia. This is all part of the radical experiment that the Prime Minister and the NDP have imposed that has contributed to 47,000 drug overdose deaths, with the biggest increases in the places where this approach has been tried. Alberta has reduced overdoses by 50% with treatment.

Why will he not follow the science and back the plans that work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for anyone puzzled by the nod link to federal jurisdiction in that question, that was an ad in support of John Rustad, the B.C. Conservative leader, who is about to be in a campaign. The Leader of the Opposition continues to focus on ideology while we roll up our sleeves and work with partners on delivering solutions for Canadians.

We need to lead with compassion and science, and that is what we will always do.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is federal because the federal Prime Minister is offering a Criminal Code and Controlled Drugs and Substances Act exemption to allow the drug dens to go ahead, and he has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on tax-funded, unsafe supply, which is killing our people and addicting our kids. It is just like on car theft, where he has brought in catch and release and house arrest for career car thieves.

Today, he has a chance to reverse himself and vote for common-sense Bill C-379 to bring in mandatory jail time for career car thieves. Will he do the right thing?

• (1515)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see a return to the failed Stephen Harper, tough-on-crime policies that do not work. Mandatory minimums struck down by the Supreme Court do not work.

What has worked is increasing the number of scanners, after Stephen Harper's government cut them; increasing investments in policing and AI to process and discover containers that have cars in them, to crack down on auto theft; and stepping up with science and solutions, instead of just flailing around and using the same failed Harper playbook.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are dealing with a housing crisis, but our government is propos-

Oral Questions

ing real solutions. Last November, we reached a \$1.8-billion housing agreement with the Government of Quebec.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how that agreement is delivering results in my riding, Alfred-Pellan, and throughout Quebec?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Alfred-Pellan for championing this important file.

Last November, we signed an historic \$1.8-billion agreement with the Government of Quebec to speed up the construction of 8,000 housing units. We know that the housing issue can only be resolved if all levels of government work together.

The Conservative leader's housing plan is laughable and has been ridiculed by every expert in the country. He even wants to tear up this agreement with Quebec. He is not serious about housing, and he attacks elected officials in Quebec. If all of his policies are like that, then he has a lot of work to do.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, Ahmed Fouad Mostafa Eldidi appeared in an ISIS torture video dismembering a human body on a crucifix. In 2018, the NDP-Liberal government let him in, later giving him citizenship, only to find, from French authorities, that he was plotting a massive terrorist attack on people living in the Toronto area. Also, in the last several weeks, we learned that another potential terrorist gained access under a student visa to plan an attack on New York City Jews.

Why will the Prime Minister not reverse the damage he has done to our borders, secure our country and stop the terrorism?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition was genuinely serious in his concern for national security, he would choose to get the top secret clearance that we have offered him instead of putting forward this little performance. We, on this side of the House, do not play politics with national security.

*Oral Questions***FINANCE**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, carbon tax Carney is already getting his way. Only days after he took on the unofficial and unelected role as finance minister, we learned that the company he chairs is now seeking 10 billion federal Canadian tax dollars, money to control Canadians' pensions. He has gone from carbon tax Carney to conflict of interest Carney and, now, coincidence Carney.

Will the Prime Minister cut loose carbon tax Carney and call a carbon tax election so Canadians can choose their future?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a hard pivot away from security clearance. The reality is the member is jealous that top-notch economists and world-renowned experts back our plan to fight climate change and grow the economy, but he is stuck with late-night, far-right conspiracy videos on YouTube.

• (1520)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if carbon tax Carney has nothing to hide, then he would simply sign up and have an ethics clearance and an ethics committee review. We have tried to bring him to the ethics committee.

[Translation]

However, the Bloc Québécois worked with the Liberals to prevent that from happening.

[English]

We tried to get him to follow the conflict of interest law, but the Prime Minister refuses to swear him in as a public servant.

If there is no conflict of interest, why will carbon tax Carney not do a full job as a public servant that can be scrutinized by our ethics committee, rather than fleecing Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do not forget that the Leader of the Opposition is really cheesed that we did not hire him for the government payroll. That Mark Carney has chosen to step up to fight with the Liberal Party against the reckless and dangerous economic plans of the Conservative Party should be an example to all Canadians.

People across the country are beginning to see how ridiculous and dangerous the ideas that the Leader of the Opposition is putting forward are, and are stepping up to roll up their sleeves and fight back against that brokenist, austere vision of not helping Canadians, of hurting Canadians, of going back to a time when Canadians did not have a bright future.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, rental markets and home prices in communities across the country are making it difficult for Canadians to find an affordable place to live. The current systems in place to guide or protect Canadians while they make these important purchases are not enough.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what protection Canadians will find in the new blueprints for a renters' bill of rights and a homebuyers' bill of rights?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Brampton South for her advocacy on this important issue.

This week, we released the blueprints for a renters' bill of rights and a homebuyers' bill of rights. They lay out a plan to help protect renters from unfair practices like renovictions and excessive rent increases, something the Conservative leader could not care less about.

The Conservative leader is a failed Harper housing minister with a laughable record. Lazy politicians come up with lazy policies and failed results. That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition is offering Canadians.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people living in Gaza and the West Bank continue to suffer unbearable atrocities. Canadians have been pleading with the government to do more to promote peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. Today, the Liberals had a chance. Today, they had a chance, and yet, they failed to support a UN vote that demanded that Israel end its unlawful occupation of Palestinian territories. Once again, they are choosing whose human rights matter.

Why are the Liberals refusing to uphold international law and protect the lives of Palestinians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been too much suffering from Hamas's horrific attacks on October 7 to the heartbreaking catastrophe in Gaza. It has to end. We call for an immediate ceasefire, for the release of all hostages, for an urgent increase in humanitarian assistance in Gaza and for Palestinian civilians to be protected. We need to return to a path to peace based on a two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace and security.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it has been over a decade since my community was promised two-way, all-day GO train service from Kitchener to Toronto, yet we still do not even have a timeline for completion. Folks in my community are stuck on overcrowded buses that are getting worse and worse each year. The federal government has already committed 40% of the project costs. That is over three-quarters of a billion dollars.

Will the Prime Minister join me and local community leaders in calling for accountability from Premier Ford and pushing for a timeline for project completion?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, this government has put record amounts of infrastructure investment on the table to support Canadians in building transit, in building the infrastructure they need to get to and from work, and to be able to afford better homes closer to work. These are the things we are continuing to invest in.

We call on all premiers to step up in their investments, to work with us on investing, to not listen to their Conservative colleague in Ottawa who wants to cut and underinvest in infrastructure, and instead, to work with us to invest in a stronger future for all Canadians.

● (1525)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The Liberal government chose to fund a Russian propaganda film, and if you seek it, you may find unanimous consent to table an article that is—

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: I do not hear unanimous consent for the request.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with some trepidation based on comments made in question period.

I have been diving through the Standing Orders to see what order I find has been offended. You might find it in Standing Order 11(2) under “order and decorum”. Of course, Standing Order 16 protects members of Parliament, the royal family and other parts of the Government of Canada from disrespectful comments and, well, the commentary is there.

However, I find it worrying that we may be setting a pattern of being able to abuse with offensive nicknames people who are respected Canadians, Canadian citizens who have not been elected. I therefore suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, and you can rule on whether it is appropriate, that to say a slur like “carbon tax Carney” might offend Standing Order 11(2).

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am sorry. I cannot be heard.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her intervention.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I appreciate the hon. member's raising this point of order. The Chair will take a look at the points that she raised and the particular subsections, and will come back if it is necessary to do so.

* * *

GRAND CHIEF CATHY MERRICK

The Speaker: Colleagues, following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand there is an agree-

Private Members' Business

ment to observe a moment of silence in memory of Cathy Merrick, grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

[*Translation*]

I invite hon. members to rise.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

COMBATING MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT ACT

The House resumed from September 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-379, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (motor vehicle theft), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: It being 3:29 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-379 under Private Members' Business.

Call in the members.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 855*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Angus	Arnold
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bezan	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Block
Bragdon	Brassard
Brock	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Caputo
Carrie	Chabot
Chambers	Champoux
Chong	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	DeBellefeuille
Deltell	d'Entremont
Desbiens	Desilets
Doherty	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Ellis	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Ferreri
Fortin	Gallant
Garon	Gaudreau
Généreux	Genuis
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback
Jeneroux	Jivani
Kelly	Khanna
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kram	Kramp-Neuman

Private Members' Business

Kurek
Lake
Larouche
Lehoux
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lobb
Majumdar
Mazier
McLean
Michaud
Morantz
Motz
Nater
Patzner
Pauzé
Perron
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Roberts
Ruff
Scheer
Seeback
Shipley
Sinclair-Desgagné
Soroka
Ste-Marie
Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake)
Stubbs
Therrien
Tochor
Trudel
Van Popta
Vidal
Viersen
Vis
Wagantall
Wauh
Williams
Zimmer— 149

Kusie
Lantsman
Lawrence
Lemire
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Maguire
Martel
McCauley (Edmonton West)
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Muys
Normandin
Paul-Hus
Perkins
Poilievre
Reid
Richards
Rood
Savard-Tremblay
Schmale
Shields
Simard
Small
Steinley
Stewart (Toronto—St. Paul's)
Strahl
Thériault
Thomas
Tolmie
Uppal
Vecchio
Vien
Villemure
Vuong
Warkentin
Webber
Williamson

Fry
Gainey
Gazan
Gould
Guilbeault
Hanley
Hepfner
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Ien
Johns
Jones
Julian
Kelloway
Khera
Kusmierczyk
Lambropoulos
Lapointe
Lauzon
Lebouthillier
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McPherson
Mendicino
Miller
Murray
Noormohamed
Oliphant
Petipas Taylor
Robillard
Romanado
Sahota
Saks
Sarai
Schieffe
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sorbara
Sudds
Taylor Roy
Trudeau
Valdez
van Koeverden
Vandenbeld
Weiler
Yip
Zarrillo

Gaheer
Garrison
Gerretsen
Green
Hajdu
Hardie
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Idlout
Jaczek
Joly
Jowhari
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lattanzio
LeBlanc
Lightbound
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse
May (Cambridge)
McDonald (Avalon)
McKay
McLeod
Mendès
Miao
Morrissey
Naqvi
O'Connell
O'Regan
Qualtrough
Rogers
Rota
Sajjan
Samson
Scarpaleggia
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Singh
Sousa
Tassi
Thompson
Turnbull
Van Bynen
Vandal
Virani
Wilkinson
Zahid
Zuberi— 170

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anand
Arseneault
Ashton
Bachrach
Bains
Barron
Beech
Bibeau
Blair
Blois
Boulerice
Brière
Carr
Chagger
Champagne
Chen
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Coteau
Damoff
Desjarlais
Dhillon
Dong
Dubourg
Duguid
Ehsassi
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser

Ali
Anandasangaree
Arya
Atwin
Badawey
Baker
Battiste
Bendayan
Bittle
Blaney
Boissonnault
Bradford
Cannings
Casey
Chahal
Chatel
Chiang
Cormier
Dabrusin
Davies
Dhaliwal
Diab
Drouin
Duclous
Dzerowicz
El-Khoury
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland

PAIRED

Members

Liepert

Ng— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

I would like to have the members' attention.

As I mentioned in my statement on Monday, September 16, the volume of earpieces will now be reset.

Routine Proceedings

CANADA MEDIA FUND

[English]

Members using their earpiece at this time will have to readjust the volume. I thank them for paying particular attention to the sound level.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[Translation]***CANADA NATIONAL PARKS ACT**

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act.

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

* * *

● (1545)

*[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 68th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 68th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be concurred in.

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

It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

LETS'EMOT REGIONAL RECREATION AND AQUATIC CENTRE

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to present a petition in respect to the Lets'emot Regional Recreation and Aquatic Centre. Lets'emot means one heart, one mind in the Halq'eme'ylem language.

Local first nations, the District of Kent and the village of Harrison Hot Springs are looking for more support from the federal government. Indigenous Services Canada has told local first nations that when it wants to partner with the community, it is not possible under our Treasury Board guidelines.

Why can the Treasury Board not enact policies that respect first nations, that are working hand in hand with their partners and communities to build the infrastructure we need in Canada?

The petitioners want to see some action.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition today that is signed by Canadians who are very concerned about a film that has come out, which was funded by the Government of Canada through the Canada Media Fund and by TVO, called *Russians at War*. The film paints a nice picture of the Russians fighting in Ukraine without laying out all of the war crimes that they are committing and the illegal invasion that they have started.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to get back all of the taxpayers' money, the \$345,000, that went to the film's producer, Ms. Trofimova, who was employed by Russia Today in the past, which is sanctioned by the Government of Canada. She used those monies to bring out this misinformation campaign.

The petitioners are calling on the government to audit all the programs that they have currently, like the Canada Media Fund, to see how taxpayer dollars were used to further the Russians' interest right here in Canada. They are requesting that both CSIS and the RCMP do an investigation on whether or not there was any international or Canadian law, or Ukrainian law for that matter, that was violated. Finally, they want the RCMP to seize all material so that it can be used to go forward with the investigation on any war crimes that she may have captured on film but did not actually put into the documentary. The documentary is being aired now at the Toronto International Film Festival and other places in Canada.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition that has been signed by 1,844 Canadians regarding crisis pregnancy centres.

Over 150 anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centres in Canada work to dissuade those who are pregnant from having abortions via medical misinformation and emotional manipulation. This petition calls on the government to take action on these crisis pregnancy centres and to review their charitable status.

MOVIE INDUSTRY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this petition that I am presenting has attracted the signatures of over 1,236 Canadians who are very concerned about an issue relating to the culture of South India, Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora here in Canada. They are finding that, due to the monopolistic behaviour of movie chains, South Indian movies are not available and that some movie theatres have been subjected to recurring acts of vandalism. Specifically, Cineplex and Landmark do not play South Indian movies in their cinemas, and in the absence of these two top chains, South Indian movie lovers are made to watch these movies in sub-standard theatres, paying higher ticket prices.

Privilege

The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada direct law enforcement to get to the bottom of the vandalism that is occurring, which seems only to affect Cineplex and Landmark; direct the Competition Bureau to investigate this cartel-like behaviour; direct Cineplex and Landmark to start playing South Indian movies; and provide recourse with respect to law enforcement so that we fully embrace the whole tapestry of the wealth that is brought to Canada through multicultural, South Indian and Tamil diaspora here in Canada.

• (1550)

SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today.

The first petition is from constituents of mine; they signed it during the Auburn Bay Stampede breakfast. It is about the Auburn Bay Calgary Co-op. It is specifically about the single-use plastics ban introduced by the government in December 2023. In Calgary, we have a compostable green bag that is only used by the Calgary Co-op. These are the facts that constituents want to draw to the attention of the Government of Canada.

First, there is no plastic in the bags. They are fully compostable in the City of Calgary's composting system. They have received information from the federal government saying they are forbidden from using the bags. Now they are being handed out only if someone purchases them at tills, as opposed to being given out when purchasing groceries at the store. This is done at a huge cost. The City of Calgary supports the Calgary Co-op's use of compostable bags, stating that they fully break down in their composting facilities.

Further, the federal ban, as it stands now, allows for Calgary Co-op to sell its compostable bags on store shelves but prevents them from selling these same bags a few feet away at the checkout. This makes little sense and, they say, does very little to limit their actual use.

They are asking for the Government of Canada to recognize that compostable bags do not constitute single-use plastic and, therefore, are worthy of an exemption to the upcoming ban.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my next petition is from constituents of mine. While I was door knocking, this was being filled out, and they asked for the following: They would like the House of Commons to call for a vote of non-confidence and for a federal election 45 days after that successful vote.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers also be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTS

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words on behalf of the Bloc Québécois regarding the question of privilege raised by the House leader of the official opposition. I will be brief. Everything has already been said more than once in the House.

Parliament's authority to compel the production of government documents is very clearly established. The only limit to the House's ability to demand whatever information it deems necessary from the government is the good judgment of the House, not the goodwill of the government. Otherwise, the very principle of responsible government is meaningless.

On June 10, the House made its position clear. It ordered the government to hand over a series of documents to the law clerk of the House so that he could forward them to law enforcement. The volume of documentation may have been huge, but the order was still clear. The government failed to comply, thereby breaching the privilege of the House. There may be a good reason for this, but it does not change anything. I invite you to find a prima facie breach of privilege, so that the House can then deal with it.

As I was saying, the only limit to the House's ability to demand information is the House's good judgment, not the government's goodwill. Rest assured that the Bloc Québécois intends to use its good judgment as usual.

The Conservative House leader stated that he intends to move a new motion to compel the production of these documents within eight days. Is eight days reasonable? I am not in a position to judge. If the government needs a few more days, we can talk about it. If the government has a good reason for not producing all the documents, it should say what it was. The House can then exercise its judgment.

In his speech on September 16, the House leader of the official opposition blamed the Auditor General. Let me be clear: This is not about the Auditor General. She is a highly respected officer of Parliament. It is our duty to protect her from the government and the opposition, not to put her between a rock and a hard place.

The documents she had access to for her own performance audit are government documents. The government's refusal to comply with an order from the House put her in a delicate position, but it is the government that is at fault. The government is the one required to produce what the House demands. The government is the one in breach of parliamentary privilege. It is a serious issue and I invite parliamentarians to work on it seriously.

In particular, we need to avoid making sweeping accusations. Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, may be appallingly mismanaged, but we have no evidence at present that the companies that received support did anything wrong. That is precisely why we want the RCMP to have access to all the information. Given the highly partisan nature of our work these days, we need to make sure we avoid tarnishing the reputations of people who may not have done anything wrong. However, if there has been corruption, if an investigation finds that the companies obtained money in a questionable manner, then they will need to pay it back. For that, the investigation would need to proceed. Obviously, it is possible that the RCMP does not want the documents. It is possible that evidence obtained in an unusual way may be harder to use in court. That is possible. If that is the case, then the RCMP can refuse the documents. It is as simple as that.

This does not change the fact that the government has an obligation to comply with an order of the House. The motion does not compel the RCMP to accept the documents if it does not want them. It is not our style to do something harmful just to score political points. We in the Bloc Québécois are not like that. The Bloc Québécois will not employ a scorched-earth strategy for partisan purposes. We will not engage in a mudslinging exercise that would sabotage all environmental programs or undermine justice.

For this to happen, the House would have to deal with the issue. That is why I invite you to find that the government has committed a *prima facie* breach of the privilege of Parliament. Then Parliament can do its job, I hope, responsibly and wisely.

• (1555)

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am also rising to respond to the question of privilege raised on September 16 by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, respecting the motion adopted by the House on June 10. I would like to start by stating that this does not constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege, as the House has overstepped its authority in this instance.

The motion, as adopted by the House, does not order that the documents be provided to members of Parliament. It simply states that they be provided through the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel to a third party. While the House has the right to order the production of documents for its own use, it does not have the right to do so for the exclusive use of a third party. This point is made clear in the report of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections from 1991, which states, “It is well established that Parliament has the right to order any and all documents to be laid before it which it believes are necessary for its information.” The key words here are “laid before it” and “necessary for its information”.

Privilege

For this reason alone, the Chair should not find that this constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege.

Having said that, I want to take this opportunity to provide the government's perspective on this motion. The government has grave concerns about potential charter violations that may result from turning over some of the information of the government, SDTC and the Auditor General to the RCMP, as outlined in the motion. The motion, as adopted, appears to be unprecedented and creates a troubling model that would enable the House of Commons to exempt law enforcement from the requirement to seek judicial permission to obtain a broad production of information free from charter constraints.

As members will know well, section 8 of the charter protects persons against unreasonable government interference with their reasonable expectations of privacy. Government action that interferes with this expectation must be authorized by a law that satisfies section 8's reasonableness standard. Ordinarily, proceedings in Parliament, including responses to motions adopted by the House of Commons, would be protected by parliamentary privilege and would not be admissible in other proceedings. As I have indicated, in the circumstances, the House of Commons has not even asked for the documents to be provided to members of Parliament in the course of their work; rather, it has expressly referred the information to the RCMP. This goes beyond the authority of the House to order the production of documents.

Even if one were to accept that the motion is within the authority of the House, which the government does not, the motion does not displace the legal obligations that would potentially inform the lawfulness of the RCMP's access to and use of materials received from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, including those under the charter.

Should the RCMP wish to engage with the materials received, it will follow its own process and protocols to determine whether and how these materials may be used in a lawful way. As members well know, the RCMP requires lawful authority to invade privacy for the purpose of furthering any criminal investigation. In requiring that the information be turned over to the RCMP, the House of Commons appears to have appropriated the role of the judiciary in authorizing RCMP access to information, presumably to further a criminal investigation, but without replicating or observing any of the constitutional safeguards that normally constrain the police in such activities. This highly unusual approach may invite judicial scrutiny of both the use of any of the information by the RCMP and the legal underpinnings of how the information came to be in the RCMP's possession. It is not just the government that has this view; the RCMP itself has expressed this to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel.

• (1600)

In a July 25, 2024, letter from RCMP commissioner Mike Duheme to the law clerk and parliamentary counsel, he stated:

Privilege

I am writing to you regarding the Opposition Motion that was passed in the House on June 10, 2024, which requires the production of documents from the government, the Auditor General, and Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC) to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel with the intention of providing these documents to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Subsequent to the motion, the RCMP undertook a review and examination of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) tabled report on SDTC, along with additional administrative reports by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada and publicly available information. The RCMP has concluded that the available reports do not identify any criminal offences or evidence of criminal wrongdoing at this time, whether in relation to any specific individual or organization.

The OAG and the RCMP are governed by well-established processes that consider their respective mandates. These processes ensure compliance with applicable legal standards in order to preserve the viability of any potential criminal investigation and prosecution. The OAG has broad powers to compel information in a manner that is not possible in a criminal investigation. There are therefore safeguards in place to ensure information obtained by the OAG is not used to circumvent the legal obligations required for criminal investigations. If the OAG finds evidence of criminality during an audit, they have the authority to advise the RCMP. To date, the RCMP has not received any referral from the Auditor General or her office in relation to the SDTC matter.

The RCMP has also reviewed the implications of the Motion in a potential criminal investigation. Before taking any investigative steps to access documents that may give rise to a reasonable expectation of privacy, the RCMP must comply with applicable legal standards to preserve the viability of any potential criminal investigation or prosecution. The Parliamentary production order does not set aside these legal requirements. For the reasons set out above, the RCMP's ability to receive and use information obtained through this production order and under the compulsory powers afforded by the Auditor General Act in the course of a criminal investigation could give rise to concerns under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is therefore highly unlikely that any information obtained by the RCMP under the Motion where privacy interests exists could be used to support a criminal prosecution or further a criminal investigation.

Given the risks associated with receiving information under the Motion or other compulsory authorities, practices need to be put in place to identify the nature and the source of information, with a view to determining whether it contains Charter-protected information. Any information obtained through the Motion or other compulsory authorities would need to be segregated from an RCMP investigation. There is significant risk that the motion could be interpreted as a circumvention of normal investigative processes and Charter protections.

The RCMP will continue its review of available information that does not give rise to concerns under the Charter to determine if sufficient evidence exists to launch a criminal investigation. I would like to emphasize as well that the RCMP is operationally independent and strictly adheres to the principle of police independence. In a free and democratic society, this ensures that the government cannot direct or influence the actions of law enforcement and that law enforcement decisions remain based on the information and evidence available to police.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Duheme

Commissioner

This letter speaks for itself. Personally, I do not want to live in a country where politicians can use their power to trample on the privacy rights of Canadians and bypass the legal protections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to provide information to law enforcement without any due process or judicial oversight.

Given the concerns expressed above, the government must take every care to ensure we are adequately protecting sensitive information that would be inappropriate to disclose, which prompts the necessity to review all records carefully and with restraint, redact information and then provide, in a staggered manner, that immense volume of material to the law clerk and parliamentary counsel.

I would like to raise the issue of the interpretation of the motion adopted on June 10, 2024. The motion states, in part:

That the House order the government, Sustainable Development Technology Canada (SDTC) and the Auditor General of Canada each to deposit with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, within 30 days of the adoption of this order, the following documents, created or dated since January 1, 2017, which are in its or her possession, custody or control....

● (1605)

The motion as adopted is silent on whether the documents requested should or should not be redacted. The practice in this place for document motions is that, if they are to be provided unredacted, this is stated in the motion. In this instance, this was not included in the motion.

As members well know, the government, through its officials, is bound by certain statutes to protect certain information from disclosure. In fact, in the past when the House has insisted that documents be produced in unredacted form, governments of both stripes have worked constructively with other parties to establish appropriate mechanisms to protect the disclosure of information that would otherwise not have been disclosed due to their protections offered by statute. While the motion is unusual in that it does not require that the documents be produced to the House itself, rather to the RCMP through the law clerk and parliamentary counsel, the government interpreted that these documents could be redacted to abide by statutory protections.

This is especially the case in this instance, and the government could not in good conscience interpret the meaning of this motion such that it would trample on the Charter rights of Canadians and exempt law enforcement from judicial oversight. This would be an extremely reckless and dangerous interpretation for the government to take, so while the government believes that the motion exceeds the authority of the House, it did try to comply in good faith in a way that respects the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Furthermore, as I have stated, the order did not explicitly state that documents could not be redacted, and second, since these documents were being transmitted to the RCMP, the police force, should it wish to investigate this matter, could use its investigative powers to compel any information that had been redacted if it deemed it material to any potential investigation.

Furthermore, the Auditor General of Canada, who is an independent officer of Parliament, appointed by Parliament, raised her own concerns about the production of documents in the motion adopted by the House. In her response to the request from the law clerk and parliamentary counsel, the Auditor General stated:

I share the view that Commissioner Duheme expressed to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts (PACP) on June 18, 2024—the OAG has a strong working relationship with the RCMP that is grounded in a well-established process to access information in our audit files. This is important because of the rights established in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that apply to criminal proceedings, and because the courts play an important role in ensuring that information obtained by law enforcement respects those rights. In the past, the RCMP has obtained production orders to ensure that information from the OAG has been obtained legally and can be used when a criminal prosecution is launched.

This is precisely the approach that is being taken by the government. If the government is of the view that activities may be of a criminal nature, the government has ensured and will always ensure that any information that may be material to criminal investigation is forwarded to the RCMP. That is how our system works. There are separate branches of government for very good reason.

The Auditor General states this clearly with respect to its relationship with law enforcement:

Where the OAG is of the view that activities may be of a criminal nature, we promptly inform the RCMP. As we did not reach this conclusion in our audit of SDTC, we did not engage with the RCMP about our audit findings before my report was presented to Parliament. Based on recent communications with the RCMP about this order, we confirmed that the RCMP would seek a production order before requesting any documents should they deem them necessary to any investigation. This would be consistent with well-established past practice.

While the government understands that the Speaker does not rule on questions of law or on the appropriate functions of other branches of government, it is for the House to pronounce itself with restraint in such matters. Many members of the House have legal training and know the divisions of power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. This is the bedrock upon which our democracy operates. To blur these boundaries is irresponsible and, quite frankly, reckless.

• (1610)

We are in uncharted territory with this matter. I have made the case that the House has exceeded its authority in ordering the production of documents, not for its own use or the use of members of Parliament, but rather exclusive to and for the use of a third party. I hope the Speaker will consider this point very carefully.

Should the Speaker agree that the proposition before the House does in fact exceed the authority of the House, I submit that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of motions that order the production of documents that are not for the express purpose of informing the House and its members, but rather of being used as an instrument to refer documents to organizations that are outside the jurisdiction of the legislative branch of government.

Procedural authorities clearly suggest the privileges of members and of the House relate to its own proceedings within the ambit of the legislative branch and cannot exceed the powers and jurisdiction of this branch of government. This principle is clearly articulated on page 190 of the second edition of Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, which states:

The only limitations, which could only be self-imposed, would be that any inquiry should relate to a subject within the legislative competence of Parliament, particularly where witnesses and documents are required and the penal jurisdiction of Parliament is contemplated. This dovetails with the right of each House of Parliament to summon and compel the attendance of all persons within the limits of their jurisdictions.

However, even if the motion were to be considered within the authority of the House, which I submit it is not, the appropriate course of action in the handling of this matter, if you find a prima facie question of privilege, would be to limit the motion proposed by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle to refer this unusual matter to the procedure and House affairs committee for study. This would provide an opportunity for members of that committee, who are well versed in parliamentary privilege, to call witnesses and experts

Government Orders

who may help shed light on this matter and report back to the House with its findings.

This is entirely consistent with the approach that Speaker Miliken took in his decision on the Afghan detainee documents on April 27, 2010, where he provided the parties some time to discuss the issue and find a resolution. Sending the matter to the procedure and House affairs committee would do just that.

Finally, I would like to table, in both official languages, the two letters I cited in my intervention: the letter from the RCMP commissioner to the law clerk and parliamentary counsel, as well as the letter from the Auditor General to the Clerk of the House of Commons.

• (1615)

The Speaker: I thank the government House leader and the hon. member for La Prairie for their interventions on this question of privilege, which was raised first by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle. I appreciate that they both came back to the House in a relatively short order of time so the Chair can move quickly with an assessment as to whether there is a prima facie case.

The Chair will take some time to review the material that has been brought forward by the hon. government House leader and by the hon. member for La Prairie and will try to get back to the House as soon as possible.

I wish to inform the House that, because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders will be extended by 15 minutes.

[*Translation*]

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Oxford, Mental Health and Addictions; the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Taxation; the hon. member for Nunavut, Northern Affairs.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM MODERNIZATION ACT

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.) moved that Bill C-66, an act to amend the National Defence Act and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as indicated, I have the privilege today to begin debate on the second reading of Bill C-66, the military justice system modernization act.

If I may, I would like to begin by first acknowledging and thanking the thousands of witnesses, advocates and survivors who have generously and courageously offered their advice and their experience on the important matters that are before us in the bill.

Government Orders

I would also like to commend the important work and advice of Madam Justice Arbour and Justice Fish for the advice they have provided, which has so well informed this work.

I also would like to take the opportunity to thank the dedicated members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence, the Department of Justice and my ministry for their tireless work on this important bill.

Every single day in Canada and around the world, the Department of National Defence's public service employees and Canadian Armed Forces members come to work in service of their country and their fellow citizens. As the international rules that keep us all safe have come under increased threat, their task is crucial, and their ability to respond to global challenges is becoming even more important.

To effectively do their jobs, DND's public service employees and CAF members must feel protected, respected and empowered to serve. In other words, changing the culture of DND and CAF is not just simply the right thing to do; it is also essential to the readiness and operational effectiveness of our institution.

From the very first day I was appointed as Canada's Minister of National Defence, I have tried to make it very clear that my most important responsibility is to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces' members go to work in an environment that fosters and enables their excellence. They must be provided with a work environment where they feel safe and supported while they do the critical work of protecting our nation and its people. That includes that no one at National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces is subjected to harassment, misconduct or discrimination.

It also includes ensuring that all of our members have access to justice. Our people, after all, must be always at the heart of everything we do. They protect Canadians here at home, defend our sovereignty and respond to natural disasters to keep Canadians safe. They stand on the eastern flank of NATO. They train Ukrainians with the skills they need to fight and win. They work with our partners to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

It is our responsibility to protect our people in uniform and civilians, and support them. To do so, we need to modernize our military justice system in order to rebuild trust in it. That is precisely what Bill C-66 aims to do. It proposes a suite of amendments to the National Defence Act to bolster confidence in the military justice system for all of our people.

Let me share some of the key changes the bill proposes. After months of work, hundreds of interviews and the review of thousands of documents, former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour provided the government with 48 recommendations to build a more inclusive military where all members are protected, respected and empowered to serve. We must and we will implement all of these recommendations.

In December 2022, my predecessor, now the President of the Treasury Board, directed National Defence to move forward on all 48 of Justice Arbour's recommendations and issued a detailed plan on how we will take action in response to each of them. Since then, we have made some very important and tangible progress. To date, approximately 20 of these recommendations have been implement-

ed, and we are currently on track to address all 48 recommendations by the end of next year.

Recommendation 5 is the only recommendation from Justice Arbour that requires that it be implemented through legislation, so the legislation before us proposes to address recommendation 5 by removing the jurisdiction of the Canadian Armed Forces over Criminal Code sexual offences committed in Canada.

The legislation would give exclusive jurisdiction over these offences to the civilian justice system. Justice Arbour made this recommendation for a very clear reason. She stated that concurrent jurisdiction, jurisdiction that is both in the military and civilian justice system over such offences, "has had the opposite effect to that intended; it has not increased discipline, efficiency or morale, and it has not generated the confidence it would need....Rather, it has contributed to an erosion of public and CAF member confidence." Madam Arbour went on to highlight the urgency of ending concurrent jurisdiction, to give clarity and certainty to all actors in the justice system and to ensure fairness and justice to survivors.

Under the proposed legislation, the Canadian Armed Forces would no longer have jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute any Criminal Code sexual offences committed in Canada. Instead, that jurisdiction would rest exclusively with civilian authorities.

Bill C-66 also addresses eight of the recommendations from former Supreme Court justice Fish through an independent review. It proposes to modify the important process for key military justice authorities to remove any real or perceived influence from the chain of command. It also proposes to expand the eligibility criteria for military judges to include non-commissioned members so that we can help diversify the pool of potential candidates, and it proposes to expand the class of persons who can make an interference complaint to the Military Police Complaints Commission.

● (1620)

In addition to addressing the recommendations from Justice Arbour and Justice Fish, Bill C-66 would also take additional steps to ensure the confidence and integrity of our military justice system. It proposes to exclude military judges from the summary hearing system, and it proposes to provide additional supports for survivors by expanding access to victims' liaison officers to individuals acting on behalf of the victim under the Declaration of Victims' Rights.

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These proposed amendments are comprehensive, as they are required to be, and they incorporate the feedback and the needs of those who have been directly affected by sexual misconduct. The chief professional conduct and culture has conducted engagements with over 16,000 national defence personnel and Canadian Armed Forces members, as well as external stakeholders, in order to listen and to learn from their experience.

We have also consulted with current and former DND and CAF personnel, including those affected by conduct deficiencies of a sexual nature, harassment of a sexual nature, crimes of a sexual nature; victim advocacy groups; and military justice actors. In these consultations, we have heard overwhelmingly about the need for concrete and durable military justice reform in order to maintain trust in the system, and we have heard clear support for removing CAF jurisdiction of Criminal Code sexual offences committed in Canada.

We have heard the voices of our people loudly and clearly. We have listened and we have acted. We now know as well that there is much more work to do, but we are making concrete and measurable progress. Bill C-66, we believe, is an important step in a journey designed to achieve durable and lasting institutional reform. I hope that every member of the House will support this crucial legislation.

Let me also address some of the other work that we are doing to better support our people and to give them procedural fairness and access to justice that they deserve.

Since December 2021, 100 per cent of all new Criminal Code sexual offence charges have been laid in our civilian justice system. No new Criminal Code sexual offences are being adjudicated within the military justice system. In June 2022, Bill C-77 came into force, which established the Declaration of Victims' Rights. That includes the creation of victims' liaison officers to better assist victims in understanding and accessing their rights.

We developed a military-wide online brief on victims rights and the summary hearing process in order to promote awareness of changes in the military justice system so that victims, witnesses and military justice actors know exactly what to do when an incident of misconduct occurs. In budget 2022, we allocated over \$100 million over six years to support the modernization of the military justice system, as well as other cultural change efforts.

We are also making progress in implementing the recommendations that have been made by Justice Arbour and Justice Fish. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces can now take their complaints for sexual harassment or discrimination on the basis of sex directly to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. This is precisely in line with recommendations 7 and 9 made by Justice Arbour.

We have addressed recommendation 11 from Justice Arbour by repealing the duty-to-report regulations. We have addressed recommendation 14 by agreeing to reimburse eligible legal costs for those who have been affected by sexual misconduct. We are also implementing recommendation 20 from Justice Arbour's report.

We announced in "Our North, Strong and Free" that we are going to establish a probationary period to enable faster enrolment of

applicants, and where necessary, timely removal of those who do not adhere to our requirements of conduct. We have also strengthened the promotion process for senior leaders to better assess character, talent and competence.

In response to recommendation 29, I have also appointed the Canadian Military Colleges Review Board. This board is focused on reviewing the current quality of education, socialization and military training that takes place at our colleges, and I have been sufficiently clear that their cultures need to change significantly. We have launched an online database to make our conduct and culture research and policies more open and accessible, which is also in line with recommendation 45 from Justice Arbour.

As we deliver these meaningful reforms, we are committed to the highest standards of openness and accountability. That is precisely why we appointed Madam Jocelyne Therrien in the role of external monitor. Her role is critically important. She is overseeing the implementation of all of Justice Arbour's recommendations and providing Canadians with public progress reports on a regular basis.

● (1625)

In fact, Madam Therrien released her third biennial report earlier this year in May. It notes our progress on bringing about the change that will re-establish trust in the Canadian Armed Forces as a professional, inclusive workplace. In addition, she identified that there is a lot more work to do and that we have to move faster. I want to express my gratitude for Madam Therrien's work and her honest assessment as we continue building a respectful and inclusive institution.

In order to help drive these efforts, we have also developed the comprehensive implementation plan to prioritize and sequence our work right across the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces portfolio to address the recommendations from Justice Arbour and Justice Fish, as well as the minister's advisory panel, the anti-racism report and the national apology advisory committee board, which was developed to provide recommendations for Canada's historic apology to the descendants of the No. 2 Construction Battalion.

We will continue working on all fronts, because it is critical to the well-being of our people and for the CAF's operational effectiveness.

As I said at the very outset of my remarks, we are committed to building a workplace culture where every member of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces feels protected, supported, respected and empowered to serve. Our commitment to building a better military culture is highlighted by our updated defence policy, "Our North, Strong and Free". It is evident in our Canadian Armed Forces ethos, "Trusted to Serve".

Government Orders

In these documents, we have made it very clear that conduct deficiencies, harassment, discrimination and violence in any form must not be allowed to develop or remain within our institution because they cause deep harm to our people. They fundamentally undermine our mandate, our mission and our effectiveness, and they erode the trust that Canadians place in us.

Therefore we are working hard to build a more modern and inclusive military culture in which Canadians from all walks of life can serve their country. That work is being led by the chief professional conduct and culture, the CPCC. This office was created in 2021. The CPCC serves as the single authority for professional conduct and culture at National Defence. The position was initially led by General Jennie Carignan. Of course now it is being led by Lieutenant-General Prévost, as General Carignan is our new chief of defence.

It has consulted with 16,000 DND personnel, Canadian Forces members and external stakeholders, and those consultations have deeply informed our work. It has enabled us to better understand the lived experiences of our people. It has enabled us to proceed on our culture of change work from a place of knowledge, understanding, support and compassion. Culture change requires a systemic, sustained and continuing effort. It is not just the right thing to do; it is also the smart thing to do. It is essential to our operational effectiveness.

We will continue to listen and learn from people across National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. We will continue to work with external stakeholders and partners as we work toward building a safer and more inclusive work environment. I believe we are making real and tangible progress, but there is always much more work to do.

At the same time, as we modernize our military justice system and change our culture, we also need to ensure that the survivors of sexual assault and misconduct always get the support, care, respect, compassion and resources they need. Much of that work comes from the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre. This is a centre that is independent of the chain of command.

It provides expert advice, guidance and recommendations to the military and National Defence on all matters relating to sexual misconduct. That includes a 24-7 support line where members can receive confidential support and information on options, and guidance on supporting others, as well as referrals to care and service operations. It also runs the response and support coordination program to provide individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct in the DND and CAF environments with a dedicated civilian counsellor who can help them access health services, prepare for police interviews and very much more.

The Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre also runs a grant program to fund community-based programs to broaden the range of support services that will be available to the wider defence community. It offers peer support programs and partnerships with Veterans Affairs Canada.

We have more work to do to support those affected by misconduct. That is why last year we launched the independent legal assistance program, which will provide reimbursement of legal expenses

incurred on or after April 1, 2019 as a result of sexual misconduct in the DND and CAF environments. That is in line with Justice Arbour's recommendation 14, and we have responded. The program is also working toward facilitating direct access to legal information, legal advice and legal representation.

● (1630)

The work that I have outlined today is comprehensive in scope, but we need to do more and we will do more. A very important step in doing more is passing this legislation. Doing more is going to give exclusive jurisdiction over Criminal Code sexual offences in Canada to the civilian justice system, exactly as Madam Arbour has recommended.

We need to give clarity and certainty to victims and survivors, and we need to build a more modern military justice system that can maintain the confidence of the people it serves. By getting this done, I believe we will improve the operational effectiveness of our armed forces. Getting this done will help us attract and retain even more talented Canadians from right across the country. It will show them that as members of our military, they have access to a fair and modern justice system and reliable resources if they ever suffer harm.

Above all else, this is the right thing to do for our people, for our military and for our country. I believe it will help us rebuild the trust that may have been lost. It will keep our people safer and better supported, and it will help to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces has the culture, the people, the institutions and all of the support and resources it needs to keep this country safe now and in the decades to come.

● (1635)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's tabling Bill C-66 at second reading. The Conservatives will be supporting Bill C-66, but we want to send it to committee. We know that it needs to be thoroughly studied, and we want to make sure that it is going to work for victims. We want to hear from stakeholders, military justice experts and the CAF itself to ensure that the appropriate action is being taken.

The government came to power nine long years ago, and here we are in the dying days of this Parliament and the government, and the Liberals are finally bringing forward something they knew was a problem. In 2015, former chief justice Deschamps brought forward a report that sat on the desk of former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance, and on the desk of the former minister of national defence, who is now the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, for years and they did nothing with it.

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The Liberals actually covered up the sexual misconduct by former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance. They even stalled a committee from doing an investigation into why there was a cover-up from the Prime Minister's Office by Katie Telford and by the former minister of national defence. Why did they allow that to happen and why did they not act then to address the problems we had in the Canadian Armed Forces in protecting the victims of sexual misconduct?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I am very gratified to hear that the member opposite, my critic in defence, and the Conservative Party will support the passage at second reading of Bill C-66. It is absolutely essential that we move forward with all speed. We all have a shared responsibility, and I believe every single member of this House cares about the men and women who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. I believe we all know that we have to work together to ensure that they have a safe, respectful and supportive work environment. I would very much like to get this bill to committee because I very much respect the work of the committee, and I am very gratified to hear of the member's support.

I also feel a great sense of urgency. This is an important bill. As I said, on the very first day I was appointed to this position, I tried to explain to DND and to Canadians that it was among my greatest responsibilities to make sure that we find every possible way to support all of the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces. I believe that is a value that everybody shares. I will wait respectfully to hear from our friends from the other parties, but I believe it is very much in the best interests of Canadian Armed Forces members, members of DND and all Canadians that we move forward with all diligence and speed to get this bill passed. We have work to do. Let us do it together.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is going to be somewhat similar to the question from my colleague, the co-chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Since 2015, the issue of sexual misconduct has become common knowledge, so much so that Justice Deschamps, who reported on it at the time, served a guide for Justice Arbour, who also had to report on it. She wondered why she was being approached to do something that had already been done.

This bill was introduced in March, but we had to wait until September for second reading. It took some time. The bill primarily focuses on sexual misconduct, although we know that military personnel are complaining about many other kinds of grievances too.

If we had done the work on sexual misconduct a little sooner, would we have been able to move on to the next step by now and address other kinds of grievances that military personnel are complaining about? These grievances are adding fuel to an already serious fire, which explains why we are having problems with recruitment and retention.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I also feel a sense of urgency. We have to get this done.

We have made very significant progress in response to all of Arbour's recommendations. We have also published a comprehensive implementation plan, which is available to all members of the House, to give a very clear outline of the work we are undertaking and will continue to do to get this done.

There is only one recommendation contained in Arbour's recommendations that requires legislative changes, and as members know, we introduced legislation back in March. This is our first opportunity to debate it, and I believe absolutely that we have the ability to work on this important matter together and get it to committee.

I believe the committee will add great value to this discussion. It will have an opportunity to hear from witnesses and move this forward. However, in the interests of all of the men and women who have served or continue to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence, and frankly in Canadians' interests as well, we are required to put our heads down together and get this job done.

• (1640)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. minister for bringing this legislation together. The New Democrats will be supporting it at second reading to get it to committee because we know how important it is.

However, what I heard over the summer from many of the survivors of military sexual trauma, and the minister noted it, is that while the work of Louise Arbour was incredible and the consultation was very much needed, that was the work she had done. The work the government had done did not consult survivors. They were very concerned that they were left out of the consultation process for this piece of legislation.

I would very much like to hear an explanation from the minister of the gap that seems to have occurred.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I give my personal thanks for your and your party's support, which will allow this bill to move forward. That is important and it will allow us to get some work done.

With respect to consultation, as I have indicated and as Madam Justice Arbour reported, she did do fairly extensive consultation, during which she talked to hundreds of survivors, advocates and witnesses, who provided her with advice. I think her recommendations are a really clear road map of the path forward, and we have been well informed by them. I also want to assure you that our chief of the defence staff, in her previous role, conducted very extensive consultations. She advised me that she spoke to 16,000 people, and not just members of the Canadian Armed Forces, although there were many, and members of DND, but also advocates, survivors and witnesses. There was very extensive consultation.

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I also hear you, because I have heard the same thing. There are some people who do not yet feel they have been heard. We are presented with a real opportunity at committee to give those people another forum where they can come forward and share their experiences and opinions with the committee. I also hope that you engage with our chief of the defence staff, who oversaw the consultation with over 16,000 people, so that she can share with you the results of those consultations.

I do not think we can ever do enough to listen to the lived experiences. People need to know that they have been heard, and we have tried very hard to hear them. I know there is no universal consensus on exactly the right way forward, but we have been informed by the excellent report of Justice Arbour and the excellent report of Justice Fish. We have listened to literally thousands of people who have come forward and offered their opinions, their lived experiences and their advice. Our work has been informed by that experience and that advice, but I would welcome the committee taking even further steps to continue in that consultation.

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Small Business, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for putting forward this important legislation. I want to give a shout-out to all of our veterans and those who have served and who continue to serve our country, especially those from Mississauga—Streetsville's Legion 139.

I think a few of us in this room were able to be on the veterans affairs committee, and while serving on that committee, we heard many different testimonies, especially when we did the women's study. It had testimony from those who experienced sexual misconduct on how traumatizing those experiences were.

My hon. colleague talked about trust and how vitally important trust is, so I would like him to share how the reforms he is putting forward will continue to build trust with those who serve our country.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her concern.

I believe that for every member of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence, having trust in their workplace, that their rights will be protected and that they will be respected is absolutely essential. It is why, in this bill, we are trying to make very clear that all members of the military justice system will be independent in their actions so that they will not be taking direction from the chain of command. They need to know that they are going to be treated with fairness, respect and compassion. They also need to know that they are going to have access to services.

Our responsibility, all of us, is to show respect and that we have heard their concerns. We have a responsibility to every man and woman who serves in the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that they have a respectful, supportive work environment and to treat them with the dignity and respect that each one of them deserves. This bill is going to help us with that, but we have a job to do to make sure that we explain exactly what our rationale is. There has been a great deal of consultation, but there is more work to do.

• (1645)

The Deputy Speaker: Before going to the next speaker, I want to remind colleagues that we run our questions and answers through

the Chair and we do not refer to individual members with the word "you", which we are not supposed to use here but was used a bunch of times in the debate.

I know the hon. minister was thinking about me but was looking at someone else. I want to thank him for his presentation and for his comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to stand in this House and speak for the brave women and men who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. Conservatives are proud of our soldiers, sailors and aircrew, and we want to support all those in uniform who serve Canada.

Conservatives believe that sexual misconduct, discrimination, racism and other forms of harassment must be stamped out of the Canadian Armed Forces because all military members deserve a safe and respectful workplace. It is hard enough to do the dangerous work that we call upon them to do. We know they face incredible danger in addressing the conflicts around the world and the domestic responses to natural disasters right here in Canada.

The previous Conservative government, and we are talking nine years ago, accepted all recommendations from the Deschamps report to eliminate all sexual harassment from the Canadian Armed Forces. That report, as I already asked the minister about, sat on the desk of the former chief of the defence staff, Jonathan Vance, and on the desk of the former minister of national defence, who is now the Minister of Emergency Preparedness and the seatmate of the current Minister of National Defence. It sat on their desks and collected dust. Here we are, nine years later, and they are finally moving forward with legislative changes to the military justice system.

I would say that we cannot trust the Liberals to actually implement the policies needed to stop sexual assault and sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces when we look at the soft-on-crime policies they instituted in our Criminal Code and our criminal justice system in the civil courts from coast to coast to coast. After nine long years and two more reports from two more former superior court justices, the victims of sexual misconduct within the military still have no answers and they are not having their cases dealt with properly.

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As I said earlier, Conservatives support Bill C-66. We want to get it to committee. We know it needs vigorous study. We know we need to hear from witnesses, both experts and academics, who are familiar with the National Defence Act and the military justice system, but we also have to hear from victims. We have to hear from those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces and other stakeholders, including the legal community, provincial governments and municipal courts, that are going to be forced to handle the investigations, the collection of evidence and the prosecution within our court systems that are already overrun because of the soft-on-crime policies the Liberal government has brought forward.

We have these outstanding issues on whether there is capacity within the civilian court system to handle what is coming from the Canadian Armed Forces. The biggest problem is that they are overrun because of the soft-on-crime approach that is allowing people to get out on bail. Repeat offenders just keep going out and reoffending. That is why Conservatives always say, "Jail, not bail". By doing that, not only are we taking dangerous and repeat offenders off our streets and making our communities safer, but we are going to be able to free up more resources within the court system to deal with things like sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Conservatives are wondering about some of the logic within Bill C-66. It is proposing to take the investigation and prosecution of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces outside of the military itself for any offences that occur within Canada. They would be moved into the civilian system, whether it is municipal or provincial police departments, or even the federal police department, the RCMP, in some jurisdictions. We would see the skills and ability of our military police and criminal prosecutors within the Office of the Judge Advocate General atrophy and deteriorate.

• (1650)

Within Bill C-66, whenever our troops are deployed out of Canada, we are still going to be in a situation where they are going to be the lead investigators and lead prosecutors, as well as the defendants, as we know happens within the military justice system, which has both prosecutors and defenders in order to provide the balance of justice to those who are accused and those who are plaintiffs. However, if they are not good enough to prosecute and investigate sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces when it happens here in Canada, how do we know we can trust them for cases outside Canada? I know I do, but I wonder if the minister is at all concerned about the atrophy of those skills, at both the prosecutor level and the investigator level, for our military police if they are not getting the repetitions. It is just like exercise; one has to do it over and over again.

The other concern we have is about the new Governor in Council appointments. Currently, the Governor in Council, or the cabinet, the Prime Minister, the PMO, appoints the chief of the defence staff, the deputy minister, the national defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman and the judge advocate general. They are all done through an order in council and they all report to the Minister of National Defence. Now we would be adding more Governor in Council appointments: the director of military prosecutions, the director of defence counsel services and the provost marshal.

That would increase independence, but there are questions around the terms and lengths of those appointments. There is no consistency with other Governor in Council appointments we have, both in the civil system, within the bureaucracy and other government appointments, and those appointed under the National Defence Act. There is also no clarification of how those individuals would be reappointed. There have even been questions raised about whether having these three new Governor in Council appointments, who right now report to the JAG, would make having the judge advocate general irrelevant and the position undermined because of directives that can come from the minister.

We are also very concerned that this would increase political interference, which we have already witnessed with the Liberal government. This is because it would be giving the power to the Minister of National Defence to not only have control over more individuals within the Canadian Armed Forces, but also to issue guidelines under Bill C-66 with respect to prosecutions, which would open the door to that political interference.

All we have to do is look at some of the cases the government has already politically put pressure on to have moved to the civilian system. There was the case of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman; we can look at how that came about. Of course, those charges were all stayed and there was a legal settlement paid out by the Government of Canada to Vice-Admiral Mark Norman for its witch hunt.

There was the case of Jonathan Vance, the former chief of the defence staff. In that situation, he was not charged for sexual misconduct but was actually charged for obstruction of justice.

The next case I want to touch on is that of Admiral Art McDonald. Again, this was a political appointment by the Liberal government, and he was chief of the defence staff. It then came to light that there was some misconduct in his background. When it came time to prosecute, those charges were all dropped by the military prosecution office.

Major-General Dany Fortin was acquitted by the Quebec judicial system. There is pressure coming from the Liberals on National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces to move these to the civil system, so here he is getting off. All we are doing is destroying these people's reputations, and from the victim's standpoint, they are not getting any justice.

With respect to Lieutenant-General Trevor Cadieu, his cases were stayed by the Ontario justice department.

Vice-Admiral Haydn Edmundson was found not guilty in the Ontario justice system. That case was just ruled on earlier this week, and it was found that a CBC reporter actually tampered with a witness and all the testimony was thrown out.

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● (1655)

The last one I have here is Lieutenant-General Steven Whelan, and again, the charges were dropped by military prosecutors, and Lieutenant-General Steven Whelan has filed a statement of claim. When we look at all of this, we know we have a situation where the political pressure on national defence from the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence to move these into the civilian court system does not automatically result in justice for the victims. It actually turns into situations where we have liability because of increased defamation of the characters of individuals who have served this country for long, hard years as military leaders.

We know General Jonathan Vance as a former chief of the defence staff. When we studied this at the national defence committee, for three months the Liberal chair kept adjourning the committee and refused to let us hear from witnesses and experts and victims about the cover-up that happened when the victims came forward about Jonathan Vance. The news stories broke and it came to light that the former minister of national defence, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, had gone to great lengths to block the investigation, to turn a blind eye. The Prime Minister was involved in that. Unfortunately, the only committee that was able to give any type of report was the status of women. The Conservatives said, in response to that report, that it was “abundantly clear that there has been a lack of leadership by [the defence minister] on the issue of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.”

Of course, instead of finishing the report and getting to the bottom of this, an election was called, Parliament was prorogued and the report died. The Liberals had lots of opportunities to act earlier than 2024. They had lots of reports they could have relied on. I mentioned the 2015 Deschamps report. In 2018, the Auditor General released a report on inappropriate sexual behaviour in the Canadian Armed Forces and then updated that report, the national defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman report on sexual misconduct, in 2021. We had the Justice Fish report, which was a very extensive report with hundreds of recommendations. There was, also from the status of women committee here in Parliament, the 2021 report “Eliminating Sexual Misconduct Within the Canadian Armed Forces”. What did we have? Indecision, dithering, delays and punting this down the road to 2024.

Meanwhile, while all this was happening, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment and sexual violence have escalated. As I have said before, we are trying to push out any sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces on base and here in Canada. Since 2015, over the last long nine years of the Liberal government, we have seen total sexual assaults at all three levels increase 74.83%. As for sexual violence in Canada, and this is all Canadians, sexual violence against children has increased 118.85%. Forcible confinement or kidnapping is up 10.6%. Indecent and harassing communications are up 86.41%. Non-consensual distribution of intimate images is up 801%. Trafficking in persons is up 83.7%.

These are huge numbers that are dominating the work of our civil judicial system, whether it is in defendants or prosecutors or municipal or provincial or federal police forces. We are now going to throw in there an increase in sexual misconduct that we are seeing at national defence.

Over the last five years, sexual misconduct reports have increased from 256 to 443. That is an increase of 73% under the watch of the Liberal government, which has turned a blind eye to this problem and failed to act in an appropriate manner.

● (1700)

However, I do not think we should be surprised by this at all, because this is a Liberal government that has failed our Canadian Armed Forces. It has failed our brave women and men, who are the best of the best that Canada has to offer. They go through some of the roughest training. They get screened from a medical and a health perspective before they are ever allowed to don the uniform, and the current government has allowed our Canadian Armed Forces to fall into complete disrepair for nine long years.

Our warships are rusting out, our fighter jets are worn out, the army has been hollowed out, and we are so short of soldiers, sailors and air crew that all our troops are burnt out. We have entire air squadrons now that have been shut down because we do not have enough personnel, whether pilots or maintenance personnel, to keep our fighter jets in the air. Our submarines are barely in the water. From all the Order Paper questions that we get back, we are lucky if we can put one submarine in the water for 100 days a year, and that is four submarines combined, which is embarrassing. How do we maintain skills if we do not have the opportunity to train and practise alongside our allies and protect our shorelines from other submarines?

When the Liberals announced their defence policy, SSE, back in 2017, I said that it was a book of empty promises. If we look at their track record, it is still a book of empty promises. The defence policy update was a year late and, again, fails to make a strong investment in the Canadian Armed Forces. In fact, after the Liberals brought forward their defence policy update, they cut a billion dollars from the budget, which is affecting the operational readiness of our Canadian Armed Forces. Over \$10 billion has gone unspent, uninvested in the Canadian Armed Forces. This means that the delivery of much-needed equipment is happening later, and our troops are getting tired of operating on old, worn-out equipment.

Our troops do not feel safe. They do not feel respected. They do not feel honoured by the government. That is why we are short 16,000 troops in the reserves and regular forces today; this is a shocking number to start with. However, because we are so short of troops, we are also short of the people, the ladies and gentlemen, who make up a kind of middle management. These are the corporals, the master corporals, the sergeants and sergeant majors, who go out there and train our forces.

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Right now, we have over 10,000 undertrained and undeployable members who are in uniform. We do not dare send them out, because they do not have all the skill sets they need to do the job that we want them to. This is the government's own number. Our military has been so badly hollowed out that only 58% of our forces stand ready to deploy; again, that is a huge embarrassment.

One thing that has really undermined our troops is that, at home and abroad, they have literally been left out in the cold. We have a housing shortage of 6,700 units. The government has only budgeted \$8 million to build homes over the next five years. Last year, it only built 20 homes for our Canadian Armed Forces members, and the year before that, it only built 18. Thirty-eight new homes will not make up for the 6,700-unit shortage we have right now, and that is why so many of our guys are living unsheltered. They are living in tents; they are couch surfing and sometimes living in precarious situations.

I will close with this: The next Conservative government will rebuild the Canadian Armed Forces by cutting down on the bureaucracy and the wasteful spending on unnecessary consultants. We have people in the Canadian Armed Forces and within the Department of National Defence who can do that job. We will reduce that tail and invest it in the tooth of our military. We will take the taxpayer money that is going to foreign dictatorships and despots and reinvest that into the Canadian Armed Forces. We will spend more on the Canadian Armed Forces than the Liberals ever hoped to, and we will make the Canadian Armed Forces stronger and ensure they have the equipment they need. We will restore the honour and integrity of our military heroes so that Canadians can be proud of them. We will reverse all the woke Liberal culture, that experiment they have been carrying on; instead, we will support the war fighters of the Canadian Armed Forces so that they can proudly serve, proudly defend and proudly fight alongside our allies when they are called upon.

● (1705)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, let me admire the hubris of the member opposite. When he sat in government and his then government reduced defence spending to less than 1% of GDP, he sat there and went along with it. Over the last eight years, as we have more than doubled defence spending in Canada, every single time, the member voted against the dollars for it. Even when we brought forward money for a well-deserved raise for our soldiers, he sat there on his hands and voted against it. Deeds speak; his actions and the actions of a Conservative government speak much louder than the empty talk we are hearing now.

I just want to comment on some of his remarks. I have been involved in the criminal justice system most of my adult life. I want to advise him that acquittal is not evidence of a dysfunctional justice system; in fact, it is quite the opposite. It is actually proof that the system can work. I also want to address another misconception in his words. When we are eliminating concurrent jurisdiction and moving these sexual offences into the civilian criminal justice system, we are not suggesting that our military police are not doing their job properly. They are excellent, and they do their work very ably.

The change is not about the military police. The change is about the victims; it is about the perception of victims, of women and men, who have been subject to sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence. We want to make sure that they can trust that they do not have to go to their boss to report their victimization. They can seek justice and support in a way that is independent of their work environment. That is how we create a safe, supportive and respectful work environment for those people, not by invoking somebody's very strange version of warrior culture.

We are talking about treating all the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces decently, respectfully, which is the way they deserve to be treated.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, let us just remind everyone that, if we actually look at what we bought and got delivered in a very short time for our Canadian Armed Forces when they were deployed and in theatre, there were five brand new C-17s and a whole fleet of new HERC-130Js. The Liberals had thrown away our Leopard tanks. Can members guess what we did? We bought a whole new fleet of Leopard tanks. We upgraded all our LAVs and our frigates, and everything was in perfect fighting condition.

Now we are in a situation where we do not have enough tanks to train with. We gave away all of our howitzers and did not replace them. We have a situation where we cannot actually deploy, because our individuals are stretched thin. This is outside the good work we are doing in the theatre of Latvia. We could not deploy anybody to go down to Haiti to help bring justice there under the government, because our troops are so poorly equipped and so poorly trained at this point in time that they cannot handle the workload coming at them. We are looking at a shortage of staff.

All we have to do is look at the track record on all the high-level cases that the Liberals have brought forward already. Where is the justice for the victims? Every court case was stayed or the defendant was found not guilty. In Jonathan Vance's case, he was not charged for sexual misconduct or even abuse of authority of his position as CDS. He was charged with obstruction of justice.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and co-chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence for his speech.

At the beginning of his speech, he mentioned the importance of hearing from victims and getting their views on Bill C-66. However, it takes a lot of courage for victims to come forward and testify publicly about this type of case.

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I cannot help but recall what happened this summer at a meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on the topic of domestic violence. It turned into a shocking free-for-all amongst the Liberals, Conservatives and NDP, right in front of the victims, who ended up leaving the room in tears. Only my Bloc Québécois colleague from Shefford rose above the fray and was respectful.

If I were a victim, I would be doubly afraid and reluctant to testify before a committee. I have an idea. If we were to hear from potential victims in camera, would my colleague agree to that?

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, as a father of three daughters, I want to make sure that any victim, male or female, who wants to come before our committee is treated with the utmost respect and that the political partisanship that we often play at would have no place in this study on Bill C-66.

We need to ensure that they have a safe place to help us do an analysis of Bill C-66. If we are in a situation where there are shortfalls within the legislation, or if there are situations that need to be amended, then we need to hear from those victims and we need to make sure they are feeling safe, welcome and respected. I encourage all members of our national defence committee to do so.

As vice-chair and former chair of that committee, I can commit today that members from the Conservative side will definitely respect all who appear. This is not about partisan one-upmanship, especially when we have those individuals in the room. This is about making sure that we get this right, that the military justice system is there to serve those who are already putting their lives on the line for this country and ensuring that they have a safe and respectful workplace where they do not have to worry about being mistreated and sexually assaulted by any of their cohorts.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly happy to hear that the Conservatives are in support of this bill to move to committee.

When the sexual misconduct scandals first came out, the Conservatives were seemingly ready to talk about the real systemic cultural reforms that were needed, but we are seeing a change within the leadership of the Conservative Party. It is certainly under new management, and they have talked about it. Actually, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman said himself today that there needs to be an end to this idea of woke culture.

There was a keynote speaker at the Conservative Party convention who downplayed the existence of sexual misconduct itself, which I found shameful, so I want to hear today from the Conservative member whether he will commit to that continued talk and support, as opposed to just pushing it aside and calling it “woke culture” when we’re talking about women and men coming forward in this place, in this institution, to make the real change that they need against sexual misconduct.

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will say that the code of service discipline, the very ethos of the Canadian Armed Forces, holds up the issues of honour and integrity. I think all of us would demand that all those who serve apply that to their daily lives. This situation of sexual misconduct only happens when those individuals are not following through on that ethos, and then they

are going to be subjected to the code of service discipline and the Criminal Code.

When we are talking about sexual misconduct, that has nothing to do with wokeness. This is about behaviour that has to change, and that respect has to happen. I am talking about ending that woke culture and making sure that we get back to training war fighters. I think that the stereotyping that has happened about our Canadian Armed Forces members in general has been detrimental because everybody who dons a uniform deserves to be respected. For everyone who goes out there, there is an expectation that they have a certain standard to meet.

Bill C-66 is for those who refuse to follow the code, and then they have to be subjected to the Criminal Code. For that, we support it one hundred per cent. To my colleague from the NDP, I will just say that, as I said to my friend in the Bloc, we will be treating this with the utmost respect and balance this conversation deserves to ensure that those who come before committee feel safe and are going to be valued in their testimony, which we will take it into serious consideration as we go forward.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too will put an end to the suspense by announcing that the Bloc Québécois intends to vote in favour of the principle of the bill at second reading so that it can be sent to committee.

However, I will reiterate some of the comments I made about the timeline that led to the passage of the bill and the relevance of debating it now.

As has been mentioned, the issue of sexual misconduct in the armed forces was first brought to the forefront in March 2015 by the hon. Justice Deschamps. This took place around the same time as a series of other events that I will come back to a little later. In April 2021, Justice Fish also made some recommendations. In addition, Justice Arbour released a report on the subject in June 2022. When she was asked to look at potential reforms within the armed forces to put an end to certain issues related to misconduct, she replied that this had already been done and studied. However, hardly anything was put in place to bring about the changes recommended by her predecessors.

It was not until March 2024 that Bill C-66 was finally introduced at first reading. Only now are we debating it at second reading. We know that it is not because the Standing Committee on National Defence has nothing to do right now. We are already working on a number of things. I am a little concerned that other matters no less important than this one could get delayed.

I am not trying to diminish the importance of any particular issue, but we have several files to deal with. We usually give priority to clause-by-clause consideration of bills so that reports can be produced. I am worried that we are going to get bogged down because, for one thing, military procurement is still an issue. Just about every week, the media reports on a new problem, whether it is sleeping bags or deliveries of light armoured vehicles. This is a recurring problem. We are likely to hear about it again.

There is also the matter of military spending. Although new funding was announced with the updated defence policy, some cuts that were announced last September are still in effect. That has led to a lack of resources in several areas. Canada is still not meeting the 2% target that it committed to at the Wales summit in 2014. That percentage used to be a minimum, but it is now a maximum. We still have capacity issues when it comes to international operations. There are problems with recruitment, retention and housing. Francophones in the armed forces are also having trouble getting services in their mother tongue.

We may end up talking about the Afghanistan evacuation in the summer of 2021, the evacuation of Kabul. During that evacuation, the current Minister of Emergency Preparedness, the member for Vancouver South, reportedly gave instructions to prioritize members of the Afghan Sikh community over Canadians and interpreters who had helped Canada. That is not the first blunder this minister made. I may come back to that later, because, on his watch, mistakes were also made regarding the then chief of defence staff, Jonathan Vance. That was likely the most high-profile case pertaining to sexual misconduct and the lack of separation between the chain of command and the military justice system. It was a case study of sorts for the many other cases that were not necessarily talked about in the media but that still plague the armed forces.

All this work that could have been accomplished might get pushed aside because we are going to have to work on Bill C-66, which could have been introduced much sooner. On top of that, we may not be able to finish the study. Anyone who has paid the slightest attention to the news in recent days knows about the sword hanging over our heads and the possibility that an election could be called. This could jeopardize the bill, which is anxiously awaited by victims of sexual misconduct in our military and other observers.

I have a lot of empathy for these victims, but I am afraid that we will not be able to finish the study, as much as we want to, even if everything goes as smoothly as humanly possible in committee. The bill may not make it to third reading, pass through the Senate, or go on to receive royal assent. However, at the very least, we all agree on the principle of this bill.

• (1720)

Another point I would like to make is that a number of victims were consulted by Justice Arbour as part of a much broader study on changing the culture in the armed forces. However, those victims do not appear to have been contacted for the specific study of Bill C-66, to fine-tune the bill. As I mentioned in a question to my colleague earlier, it can be hard for victims to testify publicly, so I would like to issue an appeal to them while I have the opportunity. If any victims wish to contact committee members to make recommendations or suggestions or to submit questions that they should

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ask, that would be great. Personally, I promise to treat any submissions in complete confidence, if only to get the point of view of people who have unfortunately experienced the difficulties of the excessive proximity between the military justice system and those facing charges.

Let us come back to the bill, which makes several changes. The bill focuses primarily on changes related to sexual misconduct. The military has other grievances as well, but they are unfortunately not addressed in this bill, which is understandable because it would have been a massive bill. It would have been almost impossible to address it all at once. I wish we had already dealt with this issue so we could move on to other things, but oh well. Again, it goes back to the issue of timing and the proper use of the parliamentary calendar by the government. We could spend all day talking about that. I will refrain from doing so this time.

On the issue of misconduct, the main amendment made by the bill is the one that could only be made through legislation. It seeks to implement recommendation 5 from Justice Arbour's report, which proposes to completely remove the Canadian Armed Forces' jurisdiction over the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences listed in the Criminal Code and committed in Canada. Previously, the only offences that could not be tried by the Armed Forces themselves were murder, manslaughter and cases related to kidnapping or human trafficking. The bill adds new offences that will no longer be dealt with within the armed forces, such as sexual touching, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, incest, bestiality, voyeurism and publication of child pornography.

These are all sex offences. They can no longer be judged internally. This is a major change that was long overdue and I think it could have been implemented a little sooner. It was the key recommendation emerging from Justice Arbour's report and, as I said, it was the only recommendation that required legislation. Some things will not change, however, and I think that is a good thing. Military personnel can continue to gather evidence while awaiting the arrival of civilian authorities in the event of wrongdoing.

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The other recommendations being adopted include ones from Justice Fish's report. Justice Fish recommended modifying the appointment process for the three primary judicial or military authorities, namely the Canadian Forces provost marshal, the director of military prosecutions and the director of defence counsel services, to make it a political, civilian process instead of relying on the military chain of command. These individuals would be selected by the government instead of military leadership. That way, they would be sheltered from any form of blackmail. I would just remind my colleagues about the case of the chief of defence staff, Jonathan Vance, who had sexual relations with a subordinate and subsequently bragged about having full control over the military investigations, ensuring that the victim could not file a complaint. His successor at the time, Art McDonald, had also stepped down a few weeks following allegations of a sexual nature. That is one of the recommendations from Justice Fish's report that is implemented by Bill C-66.

• (1725)

This bill implements eight others as well. I will speak to them briefly. They are recommendations 2, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15 and 16.

Recommendation 2 was that the National Defence Act be amended to allow the Governor in Council to appoint military judges, who can now be any officer or non-commissioned member who is a lawyer registered with the bar of their province and who has at least 10 years of experience as a lawyer and military member. This measure aims to exclude military judges from the summary hearing system. This evidently refers to summary hearings for service infractions or offences of a more disciplinary nature in general, such as being absent without leave, negligently discharging a firearm, wearing a uniform improperly or maintaining equipment poorly. Previously, service infractions like these could be tried before military judges. Now that the government is going to appoint military judges, they will no longer be able to decide matters that are subject to a summary hearing.

I understand the reasoning behind this, but I think it will still be useful to hear from people in committee to find out whether this exclusion is a good idea. The problem is that these summary hearings will always be presided over by unit commanders. This means it will always be a superior officer trying one of their subordinates, which generally results in a rather expeditious form of justice in which the person is guilty until proven innocent rather than the other way around. This recommendation may need some improvement.

Recommendation 7 from Justice Fish's report will also be implemented. It calls for the director of military prosecutions and the director of defence counsel services to be appointed, again on the recommendation of the Minister of National Defence, for terms of up to seven years.

Recommendation 8 will also be implemented, meaning that the judge advocate general will no longer be able to issue directives or instructions in respect of a particular prosecution. This power will be granted to the Minister of National Defence.

Recommendation 10 calls for the National Defence Act to be amended to enhance respect for the independence of military prosecutors, military defence counsel, and other actors in the military justice system. It will also clarify that the provost marshal, who is

the head of the military police, the director of military prosecutions and the director of defence counsel services are independent.

Recommendations 13 and 14 are for the provost marshal to be appointed by the government rather than by the military. Once again, appointments are being moved outside the military chain of command in favour of a more civilian process. An effort is made to create roles that are more self-sufficient, to avoid constantly ending up in a kind of closed circle or boys' club where judicial decisions are susceptible to outside control.

Finally, there is recommendation 16, which I mentioned earlier. It will allow any member of the military to file an interference complaint with the Military Police Complaints Commission of Canada. Previously, only the victim could do so. A third party will be able to file a complaint against a military member or superior officer if they believe that the person interfered in the justice process. The purpose is to increase the number of people who can file a complaint, including the victim, for various offences.

Other recommendations being adopted include the recommendation that non-commissioned members be allowed to become military judges. In the past, this position was reserved for more senior officers, but it did not necessarily reflect the current reality. Many non-commissioned members, whose rank ranges from private to chief warrant officer, have a stronger academic background than some officers. In some cases, they are more academically qualified to fulfill this role.

• (1730)

Now the role of military judge could be open to a much larger pool that will better respect the current reality of the armed forces, which is not inappropriate in the circumstances. There will also be a much larger pool of potential candidates to select from for this role.

In the less substantial changes set out in Bill C-66, there is the one that creates the victim's liaison officer position. It provides a representative for the victim, a sort of help in the complaints process. It also adds the possibility of a victim's representative being the spokesperson for the victim in dealing with this liaison officer. Some rather interesting recommendations were made, after all.

Finally, it harmonizes the National Defence Act with the Criminal Code regarding sex offender information and publication bans. There was a sort of code of silence for the general public on what could go on within the forces. Bill C-66 will help modernize this.

As I was saying earlier, all of this is happening in the context of an issue that we have, unfortunately, been aware of for a long time, the issue of sexual misconduct. Members will recall that Justice Deschamps was commissioned to produce a report, which she submitted in March 2015. At that time, Jonathan Vance was also appointed as chief of the defence staff, even though allegations had already been made against him. Mr. Vance continued to commit indiscretions basically free from recrimination, mainly because the member for Vancouver South, the current Minister of Emergency Preparedness, more or less turned a blind eye to the complaints that he heard and everything surrounding Jonathan Vance's appointment. That likely gave victims the impression that nothing would change and that they would never get justice if the person who committed an offence against them was their superior. Unfortunately, that was true for many long years. We can hope that Bill C-66 will have a positive impact and that it will give victims at least a little confidence in the system's ability to deliver justice when offences are committed.

Above all, the thing that I hope will change is the impression that no matter what happens in the armed forces, the boys' club will close ranks. Let us hope, once this dynamic changes, that recruitment and retention problems will become a thing of the past. It turns into a kind of vicious circle. The forces get a bad reputation, which has a ripple effect on recruitment and retention. We end up with a smaller pool of members in the forces and, unfortunately, fewer young recruits with a fresh outlook and possibly a much more assertive voice when it comes to speaking up and seeking justice. The fish, we are told, rots from the head. Often, we have to wait until the head is gone before things change. We cannot simply hope that things will change gradually as young people with different values join up. We need to speed up the process.

Bill C-66 is a step in the right direction. I hope that we can move the bill forward quickly in committee. I somehow doubt it will happen. However, if any sand gets thrown in the gears, Bloc Québécois members will not be the ones to blame.

• (1735)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to extend my very sincere appreciation for the Bloc's support in moving this bill through second reading and to committee. I also want to acknowledge the very thorough analysis of all the points that are in Bill C-66. The member did a very thorough job of articulating the important measures in this bill and the reasons behind them.

It is absolutely important that every single member of our Canadian Armed Forces, men and women, trusts that they will be treated fairly and respectfully. They should not be afraid to come forward. With the appointment of our chief professional conduct and culture in 2021 and our commitment to that position, with some of the very important work that has taken place over the last two years in implementing almost half of Justice Arbour's recommendations and with our clear commitment to doing the rest, I am hoping that we will encourage people to trust that they will be treated properly.

I also want to share that over 70,000 people applied to join the Canadian Armed Forces last year. There is no shortage of Canadi-

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ans who want to serve their country. We just have to do a better job of getting them into training and deployed in the services. I believe that the introduction of this bill and the work that we will all do together in committee will make a real difference.

I do not have a question, but I look forward to working with all members on passing the bill through committee. I believe very sincerely that the committee has important work to do and can make this bill better.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, the minister may not have asked me a question, but he did raise a point that I failed to mention when I was listing other files that the committee could examine.

With respect to recruitment and retention, yes, 70,000 people applied. The problem is that so many applications remain in the queue for so long because the processing time for new recruits is so problematic that there is no way to make up for the backlog. This is just another example of how much work needs to be done in the armed forces to improve the system. This gives me an opportunity to reiterate that I wish Bill C-66 had passed already, so that we could continue to work on everything that still needs to be done, rather than doing it now, nearly 10 years after the first red flag was raised.

Nevertheless, I will work with the minister and my colleagues on this file, which is critically important, especially for the victims and survivors of sexual misconduct in the armed forces.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, when my colleague from the Bloc and I work together on the bill, we will be vigorous in our analysis and will ensure that we get it right.

The member mentioned the member of Parliament for Vancouver South, who is the current Minister of Emergency Preparedness and the former minister of national defence. Does she believe that his protection of his war buddy, his brother in arms, former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance, was political interference, and that because of his unwillingness to address this back in 2015 and onward until 2021, after the last federal election, nothing was done on sexual misconduct? Was there a willingness to turn a blind eye to it to protect his friend?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I think there is no need to describe the former minister's actions as political interference to know, to understand and to conclude that it was absolutely not the thing to do.

Unfortunately, what happened ended up slowing down the process, because it was not until 2021, if memory serves, that journalists shed light on the issue and the Standing Committee on National Defence looked into it. Ultimately, it was unable to get anything done for two years because of the Liberals' obstruction.

Private Members' Business

The former minister's actions aside, it is undeniable that this delayed the adoption of Bill C-66 currently before us. That might have given us an extra two years to adopt this bill that, in the end, might never see the light of day.

It is shameful and the former minister's actions are partially to blame.

• (1740)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, in addition to the criminal offences, it is crucial to reassess our support for victims of sexual trauma in the military.

We have heard the concerns about the lack of institutional points of contact for francophone members of the armed forces, reservists and cadets.

I know that the member represents a riding where there is a military college, so I would like to ask her whether she supports the committee's inquiry into additional types of support for the survivors.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for London—Fanshawe for the question she asked in perfect French.

Unfortunately, that comes back to what I was saying earlier. There are so many important issues to examine. Unless I am mistaken, the issue that she raised is addressed in a motion, but there are so many motions that the Standing Committee on National Defence has to examine.

Generally speaking, the substance of these motions is worthwhile. The Standing Committee on National Defence has worked relatively well over the past two and a half years since I have been the critic for this file. The problem is not the quality of the files that we need to look at, but the fact that the workload is enormous and the number of issues continues to grow. I therefore agree with what my colleague is saying. Unfortunately, the problem is more about prioritizing all of the files that the Standing Committee on National Defence has to look at. We have more work than we have time for.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her very informative speech. She clearly has a firm grasp of the file.

I also want to acknowledge the Minister of National Defence for listening carefully to the positions of each of the other parties. Unfortunately, the House seldom sees a minister so diligent about his legislation. We appreciate it. We support the bill in principle, although it should have been implemented and passed a long time ago.

My hon. colleague raised another issue. It concerns the testimony of victims in committee who may end up getting caught in partisan crossfire from various elected members sitting on the Standing Committee on National Defence. She apparently has some suggestions to ensure the comfort and well-being of these witnesses and ensure they are treated with respect, considering the kinds of stress they may be dealing with.

I would like to hear her thoughts on that.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, when I put the question to my colleague the co-chair, he may have mentioned that the issue of sexual misconduct is so non-partisan that we should ensure the safety of the witnesses who testify about it. However, the issue of domestic violence should not have been partisan either. That did not stop us from witnessing an unfortunate circus this summer at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Hence my suggestion to have these individuals testify in camera, if they request it. The goal is to give ourselves an opportunity not to engage in partisanship, which we may be a little more quick to do when the cameras are rolling. That is a solution I am proposing. Perhaps there will be others. I would be more than happy to discuss it with my colleagues. I think it is critical for this issue.

I will pick up where my hon. colleague from Joliette left off. It is true that the minister is very attentive and available. I appreciate that. We know that he cares deeply about all issues affecting the forces. We do not always agree on how to resolve them, but we are able to talk about them in a very courteous way and that is appreciated.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (Corinne's Quest and the protection of children), as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP) moved that the bill be concurred in.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I propose it be adopted on division.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Julian moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Private Members' Business

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on what is a historic occasion. The bill before us is something that has seen various configurations over the course of the last couple of decades. Many advocates for children across the country have been pushing for repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code, which permits a physical punishment of children, essentially the hitting of children, in this country. It is a section of the Criminal Code that dates back to 1892, a time when there were residential schools and a time when children were often subjected to the most egregious types of abuses.

Today, finally, we are debating now at third reading, which means that in just a few days' time, parliamentarians across the country will be called upon to finally cast a ballot, to cast their vote on behalf of their constituents, to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code, which dates back to 1892. This is, I believe, the 18th time that members of Parliament have submitted a bill in order for this to become a reality.

It is a historic time for parliamentarians to stand against the physical punishment of children and to stand up for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action no. 6, one of its most important calls to action. There is no more important mission or role that we have than the protection of our children in this country.

That is why it is so essential that parliamentarians who have supported the bill through second reading, through committee and now through report stage, cast that final ballot at third reading so that the bill can be sent to the other place. Then, finally, after so many years of continuing with this section in our Criminal Code, we can stand up for the children of our country.

There is no doubt about this, and it has been discussed many times; I know that members of Parliament have received letters as well from people across the country who are profoundly concerned about the impacts of physical punishment of children. The facts are the following. I want to cite what was a vast coalition of 700 organizations across this country. I will be mentioning some of the organizations in just a moment. Years ago, when they called upon Parliament to take action, they very clearly enumerated the negative impacts of physical punishment on children. In their briefs submitted to the House of Commons in Canada, to all parliamentarians, they said the following:

75% of substantiated physical abuse cases in Canada arise from incidents of physical punishment. In addition to its impact on children, physical abuse places an enormous economic burden on Canada.

Across 75 [substantial scientific] studies, even mild physical punishment predicts poorer mental health, negative parent-child relationships, lower moral internalization, increased anti-social behaviour (bullying, dating violence, peer aggression), and increased risk of violence toward intimate partners and children in adulthood.

Across 69 prospective longitudinal studies, physical punishment was found to increase child aggression and other behaviour problems over time and to place parents at risk of inflicting increasingly severe violence.

Physical punishment can undermine brain development, activating neural systems that deal with threat and reducing the volume of the areas involved in self-regulation and executive function.

They pointed out at that time, very importantly, that:

No evidence has ever been found of long-term benefits.

The psychological studies, child development studies over time and longitudinal studies over decades, are very clear that physical punishment provides for potentially huge personal and societal harm. That is why it is important for parliamentarians to send a clear signal in repealing this remnant of the 1890s that has no place in child development today and, of course, no place at all in our Criminal Code.

● (1750)

Other countries have gone through this debate while we have not moved forward. I wanted to cite 67 countries that have already banned physical punishment of children. That includes all of our major allies, including Sweden, Finland, Norway, Germany, Ukraine, Spain, Uruguay, Portugal, New Zealand, Argentina, Ireland, South Africa, France, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

In a letter that was sent to all members of Parliament just a few days ago from Professor Joan Durrant of the University of Manitoba, she mentions that, since the time this bill was introduced until today, as we have yet to adopt this bill on third reading, three countries, namely Zambia, Laos and Tajikistan, have also banned physical punishment against children. What we are seeing internationally is a very, very clear consensus among democratic nations. I will not read the entire list, but 67 countries, largely democratic countries, have stated that physical punishment of children is absolutely inappropriate and counterproductive and does harm to the child. We must heed what has been a very clear message sent by so many organizations, not only from across the country but also internationally, on the evolution of the understanding of the harm that physical punishment does to children.

I wanted to also mention the organizations across the country that have come together, 700 of them strong, to say that it is time to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code. Just to mention some of those organizations, they are the Anglican Church of Canada, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres, the Canadian Association of Paediatric Nurses, the Canadian Association of Social Workers, the Canadian Dental Association, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Canadian Red Cross, the Children's Aid Foundation and the Coaching Association of Canada. Many of these organizations have strong reputations. They have worked in all areas of childhood welfare and childhood development for so long and are credible national organizations. They are all calling upon parliamentarians to do the right thing and adopt this bill on third reading.

As I mentioned earlier, there is the important fact that this is call to action 6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was the horrendous brutality that we saw in residential schools. Until call to action 6 is adopted, we cannot move forward in a way that is appropriate for truth and reconciliation. There are many calls to action that must be adopted. This one has now languished for nine years.

Private Members' Business

The Hon. Murray Sinclair, who has had a profound impact in our country, spoke to this issue back in 2017, when he rose in the Senate. This was a previous iteration of the same attempt that has been going on now for years on behalf of child advocates to move to repeal section 43. He spoke in very compelling terms. The Hon. Murray Sinclair, on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, said:

At one Indian residential school in Alberta, a teacher was charged with assaulting a student by punching him three times in the face, causing serious injury. The teacher had been convicted of assault at trial but was acquitted on appeal by a court which held that the degree of force that he used was reasonable. That case set the tone for how all children in residential schools were treated thereafter.

This is respecting section 43 of the Criminal Code.

This is something that is long overdue. If we are to heed the calls to action, and if we are to heed what we are being told by child advocates across the country, we must act at this final stage, at third reading, to adopt this important legislation.

● (1755)

I want to mention a couple of the voices that have risen across this country to support the bill.

Dr. Tracie Afifi, who is the director at Childhood Adversity and Resilience at the University of Manitoba, said:

Evidence collected over the past two decades and published in hundreds of peer-reviewed studies, has demonstrated that [spanking] is harmful to children and has no known benefits.

This research has consistently shown [spanking] to be a significant risk factor for injury, poor parent-child relationships...aggression, antisocial behaviour, slower cognitive development, emotional disorders including anxiety and depression, physical health problems, substance use, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and violence in intimate relationships later in life...

It is our duty to protect our children from unnecessary harm and give them the best chance to live happy and healthy lives that are free from violence. This starts with the repeal of section 43.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to talk about the importance of passing this bill at third reading.

A number of organizations are calling on members to vote in favour of this bill, including the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec, the Association des CLSC et des CHSLD du Québec, the Association des médecins en protection de l'enfance du Québec, and the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance au Québec. These Quebec organizations are calling on all members to vote in favour of removing section 43 from the Criminal Code.

The fact that this bill responds to call to action 6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada illustrates just how important it is for us to take this final step. There have been 18 attempts over the years to get this legislation passed. That is 18 times that the voices of children and educators across the country, who have been very clear about the importance of taking this step, have been ignored.

This time, now that we are at third reading, it is extremely important that we pass this bill and that we join 67 other countries in the world, including France, Japan, South Korea and Germany, most of which are democratic countries. We need to follow their example on this. What is more, all the studies that have been done over the years show the negative consequences of legalizing the physical

punishment of children. We need to outlaw this behaviour, which is currently allowed under the Criminal Code.

● (1800)

[*English*]

This is the final step. It has been a journey that has been going on for years. It is important. Across this country, parents and educators are looking for Parliament to show leadership to repeal an aspect of the colonial past, 1892, when we forced indigenous children into residential schools and permitted, often, physical punishment and cruelty.

Now, nine years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked parliamentarians and the government to take action and to repeal section 43, we have the opportunity to do that. I hope all members of Parliament will join together and that we will enact call to action 6 and pass the legislation before us.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will get the opportunity to expand on the comments I will provide to the member. I want to amplify the fact that there are over 700 organizations that have recognized the need to do what is being proposed within the legislation. I believe that there was a relatively high sense of co-operation that has ultimately led us to the point where we are today.

We all should express our gratitude to all those organizations and others, the individuals, who have made today possible regarding the legislation. Hopefully it will not take much longer before it ultimately passes and receives royal assent. I would like to compliment the member, who I know has been an advocate for this issue.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North and I sometimes disagree and sometimes agree. I appreciate his kind words and, above all, his words directed to the many organizations across the country that have been strong advocates for so long. This is an important point. As parliamentarians, all of us have done a disservice to those organizations, which have been calling for decades, in many cases, for section 43 of the Criminal Code to be repealed and for us to end the legalization of physical punishment of children in this country, as 67 other countries have done. Those advocates have often been frustrated by the slowness of the response from parliamentarians, but in the next few days, we can finally do justice to all of their work by adopting this legislation.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know my hon. colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby has made a real study of this subject, so I am sure that he is aware of a Supreme Court of Canada decision called *Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Attorney General of Canada*, a decision from about 20 years ago. In it, the Supreme Court of Canada said that section 43 does not violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and certainly does not condone corporal punishment, and that only reasonable force can be applied for corrective purposes.

I wonder what my hon. colleague would say about that. What is his response to comments from the Supreme Court of Canada?

Private Members' Business

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court was simply making a decision based on constitutionality. As many child advocates have said, the Supreme Court was erroneous about the impacts on children and did not consider the impacts on children, and it caused a great deal of confusion. That decision, which makes it very difficult to understand the impacts of section 43 of the Criminal Code, has led to much more confusion and consternation if we look at what child advocates are saying.

The fact that it is constitutional is not what we are considering here. It is what is in the best interests of the child, and there is no doubt, as 700 organizations and 67 countries are telling us, that it is not in the best interests of the child.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question. He just answered a question about the Supreme Court decision and indicated that it was constitutional. However, I would like to read an excerpt from that Supreme Court decision:

The decision not to criminalize such conduct is not grounded in devaluation of the child, but in a concern that to do so risks ruining lives and breaking up families — a burden that in large part would be borne by children and outweigh any benefit derived from applying the criminal process.

The Supreme Court seems to have looked at the substance of the issue and decided that it was not a good idea to abolish section 43.

I would like my colleague to comment on that aspect of the decision.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, it is hard to give a brief answer to that. All the Quebec organizations I just mentioned are calling on all members to pass this bill. The reality is that we should be listening to all of these organizations fighting for the well-being of children. The issue of a Supreme Court decision handed down some twenty years ago does not really come into play. The best interests of children should matter much more.

[*English*]

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 to Bill C-273 today and, in my comments, pick up on the question I had posed to the mover of the legislation.

Having had the opportunity to go through a number of the different organizations that have signed on in support of the legislation, what I have found is very impressive. In all the different regions, all different types of organizations, including everything from faith-oriented types of groups to professional organizations and non-profit groups, have a common thread. That is the interest of the child. All members of Parliament, I believe, have in our hearts a genuine concern. We want to be there to ensure that our children, who are our greatest treasure, will be protected into the future.

The letter that I received that talked about the 700 groups was sent to me by Dr. Elizabeth Comack. I do not know exactly what role she played, and I apologize to her for not knowing, but I would like to compliment her in terms of her advocacy and ensuring that members of Parliament are a bit more informed about the types of

supports that are out there for the legislation. I would hope that the listing she provided me is accessible, and I am sure those who signed in support and got behind the legislation will all be acknowledged. I would like to acknowledge them myself in terms of their efforts and their thoughts in making today a reality, as I expect that the legislation will pass.

In good part that is because we have a minority government situation. Even though we have a minority, one of the nice things that came out of our situation is an agreement that was signed off on with the New Democrats and the Liberals that allowed us to look at areas in which there is common interest and see how we can move forward. This is one of those private members' bills that there was some discussion about, and one reason we might have it today is that high sense of co-operation. This clearly shows that minority governments can work; we can deliver some very good, solid legislation, whether in government bills or private members' bills.

It was put into perspective well when Dr. Comack indicated that, since 1892, section 43 of the Criminal Code has really allowed parents to hit and hurt their children as a form of punishment. I want to pause there because norms and mores of society change over time. I was born in 1962, and I can recall my earlier years, in and around the early to mid-1970s, when there were many issues surrounding “my mom, my grandparents, this is the way in which they were raised” and so forth. I was surprised at the degree to which corporal punishment was being used in homes. I know from experience that it was actually tolerated quite freely in society, especially into the early 1960s, when we started to see significant changes.

Regions of the country might have reacted differently; some might have been a little slower or faster than others. However, the bottom line is that, over time, I believe people have recognized that what was acceptable back in the 1960s and earlier would never be tolerated today. When I am out in the community and see someone hit a child, whether that person is a guardian, a parent or whatever, it causes a very different reaction today than it did a couple of generations ago. There are commentaries that go along with it.

• (1810)

I was a member of the Manitoba legislature for a number of years and remember vividly a presentation that was made on the issue of corporal punishment. The presentation demonstrated that some people believe they really do have the right to hit and hurt a child as punishment. Some of the visuals that were shown were absolutely cruel. For example, there was the whipping of a child with the cord of a vacuum cleaner that left welts and physical abuse to the degree that the child would end up going to the hospital.

We are not just talking about 13-year-olds or 14-year-olds, the teenage years. From the examples I saw, it went all the way to almost infancy, two-year-olds and three-year-olds, as a form of punishment. That, to me, is abhorrent. It was during the late 1980s, early 1990s, and we knew it was happening. Some people were not necessarily defending that extreme level, but they were ultimately arguing that corporal punishment is very effective as a form of discipline among children.

Private Members' Business

That is why I say that it pleases me today, when I reflect on the past, how Canadians, as a whole, have changed those norms and mores. Many of the 700-plus organizations are educational organizations that, no doubt, share their thoughts and experiences with the public, let alone the many others out there that share those concerns, but may not have been aware of the legislation coming forward. We know better today than we ever have. It is surprising when we think of the date 1892. That really quite surprised me when I first found that out about the Criminal Code.

I want to focus a bit of attention on the calls to action, specifically call to action 6. I have had an opportunity to talk about a number of calls to action. The government, in many different ways, has completed some. Most are in progress. This is legislation that would deal with call to action 6. There was a great deal of research done by the inquiry. We are moving even more toward the issue of reconciliation. It is also important to recognize that.

I would like to think that there has been a great deal of co-operation, that members of Parliament on different sides of the House recognize the true value of the legislation and, ultimately, would like the legislation to pass. I am one of those members of Parliament. I thank the member for making the effort and bringing this bill forward. I think it was even a part of the agreement that we had, but it is something that we have to continue to support because it is really necessary.

● (1815)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, assault is against the law in Canada, and assault gets a very broad definition in the Criminal Code, section 265: “A person commits an assault when without the consent of another person, he [or she] applies force intentionally to that other person, directly or indirectly.” Note that the definition does not talk about how forceful the force must be, but only that it is intentional and without the other party's consent. For example, a slap on the wrist could be an assault if it was intentionally applied without the other person's consent.

Today we are talking about teachers and parents and the children who are under their care. The adult in the room could be charged with an assault for a slap on the wrist applied to a misbehaving child under their care if it were not for the section 43 defence, which reads, “Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child...who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances.”

Therefore teachers and parents have a defence if the force was reasonable and intended for correction. Note that it does not defend punishment, and it certainly does not allow corporal punishment like some of the other speakers have been suggesting; that is just not the case.

The private member's bill before us today would repeal section 43 and eliminate the defence altogether. As I said, it is based on the mistaken belief that corporal punishment is legal in Canada on account of the section 43 defence. It is not.

The proponent, in his testimony before the standing committee and today again, noted that his bill is at least in part in response to

the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report's call to action 6. That is absolutely true. He quoted again today the hon. Murray Sinclair, who gave testimony earlier in the Senate, and he cited examples of residential school teachers punching children in the face and causing serious injury. That is the battle the member for New Westminster—Burnaby is fighting today, and he thinks that repealing section 43 would solve that problem and win that battle. He is wrong.

There was a Supreme Court of Canada decision 20 years ago called *Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada (Attorney General)*. The case started its journey through the court system at the Ontario trial court and made its way, ultimately, to the Supreme Court of Canada. It was brought by a group of organizations that had the best interest of children in mind.

The petitioners argued that section 43 infringes on the constitutionally protected rights of children to life, liberty and security, section 7 of the charter; the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment, section 12 of the charter; and the right to equal protection and benefit of the law in section 15.

The trial judge found that section 43 does not infringe any of these constitutional rights. The Court of Appeal for Ontario agreed. It went to the Supreme Court of Canada, where Chief Justice McLachlin wrote for the majority. I will read from that decision, which goes to the very heart of the issue. She said of the section 43 defence that:

It provides parents and teachers with the ability to carry out the reasonable education of the child without the threat of sanction by the criminal law. Without s. 43, Canada's broad assault law would criminalize force falling far short of what we think of as corporal punishment. The decision not to criminalize such conduct is not grounded in devaluation of the child, but in a concern that to do so risks ruining lives and breaking up families—a burden that in large part would be borne by children.

Therefore the appeal was dismissed, but the court did not just leave it there. It took the time to give guidance to teachers, parents and law enforcement agencies as to what section 43 means. It made it clear that section 43 protects only reasonable force applied for corrective purposes, and then went on to state in some detail what “reasonable” was in the circumstances in Canada today.

● (1820)

Based on our reading of the Supreme Court of Canada decision, the Conservative members of the justice committee put forward an amendment to the private member's bill, which basically codifies the decision.

As an aside, this is probably something that should have been done 20 years ago by whoever the government was at that time. I think it was a Liberal government, but the subsequent Conservative government could have picked it up. The current government certainly could have picked that up to codify the Supreme Court of Canada decision. That would have gone a long way in clarifying the law. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

Private Members' Business

At committee, we heard from many experts. I just want to underline that the experts I am going to quote are critical of this private member's bill, but they were all in support of the spirit and intent of call to action 6 under the truth and reconciliation report. The experts said that repealing section 43 is too risky for teachers and students.

There are four witnesses I want to quote and highlight.

Dr. Lisa Kelly, a law professor, explained that section 43 is far narrower today than it was when it was first drafted in 1892, as well as in terms of how it was applied historically during the residential school days. She cited the Supreme Court of Canada's decision that I just highlighted; in her words, it "read in a series of limitations as to what would constitute reasonable correction."

At the April 15 meeting, Ms. Heidi Yetman of the Canadian Teachers' Federation stated, "the federation cannot support this legislation...unamended. The risk of unintended consequences that could make classrooms more unsafe is too great."

Ms. Tesa Fiddler, an indigenous educator who is also with the Canadian Teachers' Federation, said, "In an ideal world, there would be more support for students in difficult situations, and educators would get the support we need.... The sad reality is that it is not there, so passing Bill C-273 without an amendment will make an already challenging job more challenging." I would just say again that the Conservative members of the committee tried to put in those amendments; they were turned down by the other members of the committee.

Mr. Sébastien Joly of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers said, "the removal of the elements of protection included in section 43, in the absence of an amendment to the Criminal Code to guarantee protections for school staff, would constitute a serious risk for teachers".

I would just summarize the testimony by saying that we had some very credible witnesses at the committee who said that repealing section 43 is risky business if there is not something else to fill in the gaps.

I am going to suggest that the Liberal members on our committee actually agreed with that. At the April 29 meeting, after having the opportunity to reflect on the compelling evidence from very credible expert witnesses, the members told us that they had a discussion with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, who is apparently assuring us that there will be new legislation coming to fill in that gap.

The Liberals realize that the evidence we received from these teachers and professionals needs to be taken seriously. They realize that there is a risk, that there is going to be a gap that needs to be filled; therefore, they are promising that there will be legislation coming sometime in the future. I believe what they are saying is that we should just vote for the bill now and repeal section 43, recognizing that there is going to be a serious gap that many people will be deeply concerned about. They are going to fix it in the future. The Conservative members of the committee are saying to fix it right now.

The draft legislation is before us. We are deep into it. We understand what the issues are. Let us fix it right now. The Conservative members of the committee put forward a proposal to do exactly that. I do not think we should wait; we need to do it now. In the absence of that apparent legislation, which is going to be presented to us sometime, we need to vote against the private member's bill. That is what I will be doing.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, not surprisingly, the Bloc Québécois is skeptical about this bill, to say the least. I already mentioned this during consideration at second reading. I want to say that I proposed an amendment, which was rejected, that would have allowed for reasonable force to be exerted in order to ensure the safety of a child or third party, or the education of a child.

Today, I have no choice but to say that it is rather difficult to support this bill. Too many people came to tell us in committee not to do this, that it would be a mistake, that it would be very risky. My colleague just said so, and I completely agree with him.

I would also like to quote Professor Sébastien Joly of the Association provinciale des enseignants et des enseignantes du Québec, who told us that the association is convinced "that the removal of the elements of protection included in section 43, in the absence of an amendment to the Criminal Code to guarantee protections for school staff, would constitute a serious risk for teachers as well as other categories of school staff".

There is also Ms. Yetman, president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, who said the following:

...the federation cannot support this legislation passing unamended. The risk of unintended consequences that could make classrooms more unsafe is too great. Teachers need to be able to physically intervene in certain classroom situations. This is the reality of dealing with complex classrooms with complex needs.

If two children are fighting in a classroom, telling them that it is not nice and asking them to sit down is not necessarily going to end the fight or prevent someone from getting hurt. Sometimes the teacher or the guardian has to intervene to separate the two parties, sit them down, ask one of them to leave the classroom or something else. There are all sorts of situations. I do not want to lecture teachers. I respect the profession far too much to think that I have anything to say about it. However, one thing is clear. These teachers are telling us that we cannot tell them that they may be subject to criminal prosecution if they approach children or put their hands on them.

The courts have addressed this issue on several occasions. Members talked about that in the previous speeches. There was the Bender case in Ontario less than a year ago on December 20, 2023. A teacher was accused of assault after grabbing a student by the wrist and taking him out of class. Bender was fully acquitted by the court, which said that his actions were completely reasonable within the meaning of section 43.

Private Members' Business

Let us talk about the Supreme Court. With all due respect for my NDP colleague's opinion, the Supreme Court is the highest court in the land. When the Supreme Court speaks, the other courts must follow, so I cannot say that it is not important. In the case of Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law, the Supreme Court stated, and I quote:

...without s. 43, Canada's broad assault law would criminalize force falling far short of what we think of as corporal punishment, like placing an unwilling child in a chair for a five-minute "time-out". The decision not to criminalize such conduct is not grounded in devaluation of the child, but in a concern that to do so risks ruining lives and breaking up families — a burden that in large part would be borne by children and outweigh any benefit derived from applying the criminal process.

Yes, that was 20 years ago. It was in 2004, but it was the Supreme Court that said so. Unless the Supreme Court hands down a subsequent decision and changes its mind, the original decision still has force of law as we speak. That is how section 43 should be interpreted. Section 43 is justifiable, despite everything that can be said about it.

I tabled an amendment because I am trying to reach a compromise. I think there is some merit in that. I do not want any child to be the victim of corporal punishment, obviously, and all the courts that have ruled on section 43 say the same thing, specifically that corporal punishment of the kind where one uses an object to hit a child or hits a child on the head, or hits a child under the age of two, a child who does not understand what is going on, that is pointless. Those actions are not protected under section 43.

● (1830)

As I said at the outset, we proposed an amendment that was defeated. My amendment was kind of a fallback, a last-ditch attempt. Before that, a Conservative amendment was defeated, but a government representative also spoke to the issue. Here is what the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore said in committee on April 29:

I also agree with you, Mr. Fortin, because we heard some very compelling evidence from multiple teachers' groups from Quebec and from across Canada. They raised very legitimate concerns, and we need to listen to those concerns. However, I don't feel it's appropriate to address that in the context of section 43. As a result of discussions my colleagues on this side of the table and I have had with [the Minister of Justice], he has given us his assurance that he will be bringing forward separate legislation at some stage on a separate section of the Criminal Code, to address the concerns raised by teachers and in keeping with the spirit of what all the witnesses who appeared here proposed.

That was a long quote. I apologize. I only wanted to show that it is not just teachers, members of Parliament or parents who think this way. Everyone, even government representatives, is concerned about the impact of simply repealing section 43 without replacing it with another provision that allows parents and other individuals exercising parental authority to use the necessary force to correct a child, to control them and to prevent them from harming themselves or another child. Obviously, it is not a question of using force to strike a child. All of this seems so reasonable to me that I wonder if we are wasting our time discussing it all. I do not mean to be rude, but I think it is a no-brainer. In any case, it seemed that way to just about every witness we heard. It should be for us as well.

The bill's sponsor told us that other countries have passed similar legislation. In almost every case I looked into, those laws prohibited corporal punishment. Of course, I agree wholeheartedly with

that. Hitting a child just for the sake of hitting them out of anger, for example, is unacceptable.

Japan adopted an act in 2020 that states that a person exercising parental authority over a child shall not discipline the child by using corporal punishment or other measures exceeding what is strictly necessary for the child's care and education.

That is what it is like around the world and it makes sense. There will not be corporal punishment. It was common 50 or 100 years ago to take a ruler and strike a child or spank their bottom to teach them a lesson or put them in their place. That is no longer done these days. Society has evolved and we know that is not how we want to raise children these days. However, preventing the use of reasonable force to correct children or to control what is happening in a classroom or at the park is going too far. It puts people at risk because they will end up in situations where children might get in a fight and teachers will look away, hoping that it will not end too badly. I do not want that. If my children or grandchildren are in a schoolyard or classroom and they are getting into a fight with other children, I am not against the idea of a teacher being able to tell the children to go sit down separately so they can calm down and talk about it later. I think we need to be very careful before we do what this bill proposes.

Unless there is an amendment or at least a proposal to replace section 43 with something else in the Criminal Code, as the government representative suggested, we will unfortunately have to vote against this bill.

● (1835)

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to start with a quote by James Baldwin that has always stuck with me. He said, "The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognizing this may be incapable of morality."

Today we are here to act on behalf of the countless advocates, the families and, most importantly, the children who deserve a future that is free from violence and fear. Bill C-273 would repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code. This is the section that makes physical punishment of children legal in Canada, and as a mother of two young children, it is hard for me to even think about my girls being hit by someone five times their size and to think that in Canada, parents can legally hit children as young as my sweet three-year-old.

We stand today on the precipice of passing this bill, of creating transformative change, and I urge my colleagues in the House to reflect on the urgency and the moral clarity that this bill represents. Section 43 of the Criminal Code allows the use of reasonable force to correct children. It is an archaic provision that has long outlived its place in a compassionate society, and it is not only that this provision perpetuates violence, but that it also undermines our efforts for true reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

I want to thank the member from New Westminster—Burnaby for putting forward the bill. He noted in his speech that repealing this section is a critical step in fulfilling call to action 6 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. We must move forward and implement this bill, but also all of the 94 calls to action in the truth and reconciliation report.

Corporal punishment of children is a violation of their human rights, a fundamental truth that is recognized by the United Nations and echoed in the global research. More than 65 countries, including Germany, Sweden and South Africa, have already banned this practice, and these countries have seen profound improvements in child welfare, reductions in aggressive behaviour and long-term positive impacts on our societies as a whole. The research consistently shows that corporal punishment leads to increased aggression, increased mental health challenges and a perpetuation of violence that often stretches across generations.

I want to take a moment to respond to some of the comments that I have heard from colleagues in the Conservative and Bloc caucus. This is not something that happened in the past and no longer exists. Children are still being hit today, such as the corrective punishment of being pushed down or slapped. To think that we would accept that a three-year-old deserves that kind of treatment.

Sweden was the first country to prohibit corporal punishment in 1979, and we have seen there not only a decrease in physical punishment but also a broader cultural shift. Because the country had an emphasis on public education paired with the legislative ban, this has transformed how parents and society view discipline. As a result, violence against children has decreased significantly. Sweden is now a global leader in child welfare, and it is not a coincidence. It is the result of legislation that prioritizes the rights of children.

There is also a significant and well-documented connection between the use of force on children and the perpetuation of intimate partner violence. The research consistently shows that children who are subjected to physical punishment, even corrective physical punishment, are more likely to normalize violence as a means of resolving conflicts. This normalization occurs because children often learn these behaviours through modelling, and when they experience and witness violence in their formative years, they come to see it as an acceptable way to exert control or handle disagreements. Studies reveal that individuals who experience corporal punishment as children are more likely to engage in violent behaviours, including intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Moreover, the cyclical nature of violence is reinforced by the emotional and psychological impact of physical punishment. Children who endure this kind of punishment often struggle with anger, aggression or issues of self-worth, and these can carry on into adulthood. They can negatively affect their interpersonal relationships.

● (1840)

The learned behaviour of using force to assert control combined with unresolved emotional trauma creates a dangerous foundation for intimate partner violence. By allowing physical punishment of children, our society not only undermines the emotional well-being

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of those children, but it also perpetuates a broader culture of violence that extends into relationships between adults.

I want to be clear that this bill is not about criminalizing parents. There are actually provisions in our Criminal Code, common law defences, that would protect parents who are using force to protect their children or teachers who are using force to protect students. However, they would not protect a parent who, with or without thinking, strikes a child. They would not protect a teacher who, with or without thinking, holds in a lock or isolates a child, like occurred in Yukon schools very recently.

This is not an issue that is decades in the past. This is an issue happening now. The government has a responsibility to provide parents with the resources, the education and the support they need to raise their children in a positive and non-violent environment. This is about breaking the cycle of violence that too many children in Canada continue to experience. Our laws should reflect our highest values, and allowing physical punishment of children is incompatible with those values.

Indigenous children in particular have borne the brunt of the harms caused by this kind of physical punishment. The legacy of residential schools, where indigenous children were subjected to brutal physical abuse, continues to reverberate in communities where the intergenerational impacts of this violence keep causing harm today.

We know, from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that corporal punishment was a tool to assimilate and dehumanize indigenous children. The failure of the Liberal government to deliver on its promise to implement the 94 calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation report is reprehensible.

We are talking about call to action 6, which has been on the table for nearly a decade. Why is it requiring a New Democrat private member's bill to pass this law? While Liberals like to talk about reconciliation, their actions, or their lack thereof, tell a different story. It is simply not enough to make empty promises and drag their feet on reconciliation.

I should not be surprised by what the Conservatives did, but I have to admit I was. I was shocked. I was outraged as I watched them vote in outright opposition to Bill C-273 and stand in the House and vote in favour of legalizing hitting children. By voting against this bill, they have made it clear they stand on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of indigenous justice and the wrong side of children's rights.

● (1845)

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

Adjournment Proceedings

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

Will the government finally take the lead from its favourite premier out in B.C., Premier Eby, and invest in treatment—

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the chamber to talk about such an important issue, one we are seeing not only in my riding of Oxford but across this country.

After nine years of the Liberal-NDP government, we are seeing a national drug opioid crisis across our country. Since 2015, we have lost 47,000 Canadians to opioid drug overdoses. Because of the government's radical drug policies, we have seen a 200% increase in drug overdoses. That is almost 22 a day. These are not just numbers; they are our friends and neighbours. They have names. They are part of our communities. To see the radical government agenda that has allowed for drugs to be given to our community is quite sad.

In my riding, a mother came up to me during the summer who had a young son with a shoulder injury, and he was prescribed opioids for his pain management. He got addicted and lost his family. His kids have left him. He has not received any help for treatment despite his family asking for it. In my riding, there are no detox facilities and no treatment facilities, so even if people want support and want to get treatment, it is not available to them.

After nine years of the Liberal-NDP government, its radical policies have not worked. There is no safe way of doing dangerous drugs. It does not exist. Recently, the Liberals' best friend out in B.C., NDP Premier Eby, has finally realized that his drug experiments do not work and that we have to invest in treatment. We also saw this in Alberta, which has cut down overdoses by 50%. Treatment works.

In Oxford, I have a good friend, Patrick McMahon, whom many in our community know. He is a great champion, but he was not always involved in the community like he is today. He was once struggling with addictions and had been down and out in our community. However, he got the treatment he needed, and today he owns multiple restaurants, he gives back to our community and he is a productive member of our society.

I want to reiterate that human life is sacred and human life is valuable. We cannot give up on our fellow citizens when they are asking for help. We should not give up on our friends and neighbours when it comes to treatment.

That is why a common-sense Conservative team will ban government-sponsored hard drugs. We will defund unsafe supply. We will go after the big pharmaceutical companies pushing the opioids that are affecting our citizens. We will invest in treatment to bring our loved ones home drug-free.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our hearts go out to the families and friends who have lost their lives to the toxic drug and overdose crisis. No community has been left untouched by this tragic public health crisis. We all have a responsibility to do everything we can to help Canadians and not look away. As part of an overall comprehensive approach, our government continues to support efforts to divert people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system and towards health and social services. This approach helps reduce immediate harms and helps create opportunities for people to find a way to supports, including treatment and recovery, while keeping communities safe.

Prevention is critical. Everyone making the courageous step to seek treatment should have access without delay. Enforcement has a key role to play in disrupting illegal organizations that prey on vulnerable people. I think everyone in the House would agree that we need prevention, treatment and enforcement as part of a comprehensive approach. However, we disagree when it comes to harm reduction. Harm reduction keeps people alive, yet Conservatives want to remove an essential tool to address this crisis. People accessing harm reduction services are choosing to live another day. They are choosing to access health care and to be connected to the system. Like any service, these services need to be well resourced and well staffed to be successful, but removing services for ideological reasons is the trademark of the opposition. People struggling with addiction are not criminals. They need health care, not jail.

We changed the legislation and issued guidance to make sure that, in cases of simple possession, police and prosecutors must now consider referring the person to health and social services, issuing a warning or taking no further action. In this way, they can consider both public health and public safety. These amendments mean that individuals have the chance to get the help they need to address underlying issues rather than being criminalized for health care issues. This strategy encourages a public health approach while making sure that police have the discretion to move forward with criminal offences when public safety risks arise.

Adjournment Proceedings

We will always work with provinces, territories, indigenous communities and all partners to provide them the support they need to deliver the services their communities need most. The overdose crisis has no borders and does not care about jurisdiction. We all need to be partners at the table, working together. We should not sow division or attack people on the front lines of this crisis but work to help Canadians. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to this crisis. It requires a multi-faceted response. We are working so that Canadians have access to the full range of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services, and supports they need, as needed.

For example, budget 2024 announced \$150 million over three years to support municipalities and indigenous communities. This is to help provide rapid responses to emergent critical needs related to the overdose crisis. We remain committed to working with provinces, territories, law enforcement, people with lived and living experience, indigenous leaders and communities, professionals and regulatory bodies, and health care providers to stop the needless harm and deaths of people in Canada.

• (1850)

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Madam Speaker, they have had nine years; all we hear is talk and no action. Here is a quote from the chief of the London Police Service: “Diverted safe supply is being resold into our community. It’s being trafficked into [our] communities, and it is being used as currency in exchange for fentanyl, fuelling the drug trade.”

They are funding organized crime. My very simple question for the government is this: Will it finally end its catch-and-release laws that let the criminals cause chaos on our streets and invest in treatment, so we can bring our loved ones home drug-free?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with all provinces and territories, as well as partners, to address their unique needs and support both public health and safety. Law enforcement has been clear: They do not want to arrest people for personal drug possession. Rather, they want the necessary tools to address issues of public safety. They support a comprehensive public health approach to addressing substance use harms where they can divert someone away from the criminal justice system to available, accessible health and social services. Our government’s approach to addressing this crisis is comprehensive and collaborative. The crisis is ever evolving, making it essential to try new, innovative actions to save more lives. These actions are monitored closely, so adjustments can be made where needed, based on the evidence.

• (1855)

TAXATION

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, in June I asked the Minister of Small Business how she can support a tax hike on capital gains that will kill jobs and destroy our entrepreneurs. Instead of our hearing from the Minister of Small Business on how she was standing up for entrepreneurs in the face of the massive tax hike, the Minister of Finance rose and did not let her answer the question. In defending the hike, the finance minister highlighted that “the capital gains rate in Canada will be lower than the tax paid in California or in New York City”. However, she ignored the jurisdictions like Florida, New Hampshire and Texas, which have zero state-level capital gains tax.

A report from the Frontier Centre for Public Policy highlighted that prior to the changes announced in this year’s budget, Canada’s capital gains tax rate ranked 13th highest in the OECD, which was lower than that of the ninth-ranked United States. However, after the changes announced, Canada’s rate jumped to number three, behind only Denmark and Chile. Therefore let us correct the record here: Canadians are now, in fact, being taxed higher on capital gains than citizens of most industrialized countries, not just the Americans but also the French, the Finns, the Norwegians, the Swedes and even the Dutch.

This is what I am hearing on capital gains. The Canadian Medical Association has said that the changes will pose a significant financial hit to doctors and may push some out of the profession or to the United States, where they can still practise medicine and pay way less tax. Business groups are saying that the changes are unwise at a time of weak productivity. More than half of small business owners believe it will affect the eventual sale of their business.

Though the government claims it is a tax hike on only the wealthiest Canadians, business leaders and financial experts disagree. Focusing solely on a snapshot of the number of filers in one year, like the government did, gives false information. Most people dispose of assets such as a vacation home, a small business or farmland occasionally, not every year. Statistics Canada data confirms this.

Over the years 2011 to 2021, an annual average of 44,664 tax filers reported capital gains in excess of \$250,000, but they are not the same people every year. Sixty-three per cent of people who experience capital gains experience them only once in their lifetime. High capital gains are among the most economically damaging form of taxation because they reduce the incentive to innovate and to invest. This tax can penalize a lifetime of hard work.

Canada is already behind all of our G7 peers for productivity. Investment money will flow out of Canada in search of better returns and will increasingly go to the United States. Statistics Canada’s monthly estimates of business openings and closures reported in their most recent data that 2,000 more businesses closed than opened in May. Further, the superintendent of bankruptcy reported a 54.7% increase in business insolvencies for the year ending July 31, 2024.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Minister of Small Business will not, or cannot, raise the concerns of entrepreneurs at the cabinet table or here in the House of Commons. Instead, she sits silently while the finance minister claims that Canadians will somehow be better off, that our economy will somehow be better off, paying these exorbitantly high taxes and having fewer job creators. In fact since the early 2000s, the number of entrepreneurs in our country has dropped from nearly three in 1,000 to 1.3 in 1,000.

Therefore, I will ask the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I simply cannot put it any way other than to say that my Conservative colleague is obviously misinformed. When it comes to business investments, I can tell members that Canada is currently third in the world for attracting foreign direct investments, and that is for the very first time in our country's history. It is an amazing achievement that highlights the focus of our government to bring new investments into Canada.

One of the problems here is that Conservatives are focusing only on the top capital gains tax rate on very large investment profits. Maybe that is what his donors are talking about, but it is certainly not what middle-class Canadians are talking about around their kitchen tables. In fact, on this subject, Conservatives never talk about regular folks making regular incomes, making regular salaries or hourly wages. A worker in Canada earning an average wage is taxed less than the average across all OECD countries. I can tell members that it is a hell of a lot lower than the 48% rate in Germany or the 47% tax rate in France.

In his question, my Conservative colleague is not even talking about the regular capital gains tax rate, which is itself only paid by a very small sliver of well-off Canadians who are able to realize profits on their investments. No, the Conservatives are talking about the very top marginal rate for capital gains, those making a profit of over \$250,000 in investment profit in a single year, which is the definition of the one per cent. That is who the Conservatives are so very desperate to defend and make us all feel very sorry for.

This is ridiculous. The fact is that the rhetoric, and if I may say the populist rhetoric, that the Conservative leader goes on tour with during the summer is addressed to the hard-working Canadians who work in the construction industry, as nurses or as bus drivers. That speech is directed to folks right across the country. However, in the House, in this chamber, it is clear who Conservatives are defending. They are defending the top one per cent. They are protecting people's stock portfolios instead of their pensions. They are defending people's stock portfolios instead of the wages of the middle class. Let that be clear.

• (1900)

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I could not think of a more out-of-touch answer to the very real concerns that I raised, which were backed by Statistics Canada data. In fact, talking about middle-class Canadians, as I outlined in my remarks, the capital gains tax will often only be paid by 63% of Canadians once in their lifetime.

Why is that significant? It is because of the 80-year-old farmer in Hatzik Valley, who does not have any children, who came to me. He wants to keep his family farm in his family, but if he and his wife were to sell the property today, which is worth a few million dollars, they would not be able to have enough money to retire to assisted living, where they should be, because the capital gains tax increase they are paying has completely thrown off their retirement investment. I think of the auto mechanic who invested in a property to start a business and employ people.

The government is saying, no, that they need to give more. That is not sufficient—

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I think that the Conservatives' priority has been rather clear so far. Other than abandoning the fight against climate change, all they talk about is doing whatever they can to protect those who earn more than \$250,000 a year in profit on their investments, even if that creates more inequality and raises the deficit that they regularly pretend to complain about.

My Conservative colleague is obviously also focusing only on the very highest capital gains tax rate for investment gains. Perhaps that is what his donors are talking about, but that is certainly not what most Canadians are talking about around the kitchen table.

I think that the Conservatives' priority is rather clear. The priority of our Liberal government is to defend the middle class.

[*English*]

NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, Nunavummiut still have the highest levels of food insecurity in the country. My home territory has the highest number of children going to school and to bed with empty stomachs. Mothers are not eating enough so their children can be full and grow up healthy. These conditions are by design of the federal government. These conditions do not happen by accident. These conditions are on purpose.

The Liberal government continues to refuse to fix the broken nutrition north program. When will the suffering finally be enough for the Liberals to act? While people are suffering in poverty, the Minister of Northern Affairs' response is to do more studies. His response, when I requested that the Auditor General review the program, was to do an internal review and then, possibly, an external review. The message was clear that he is not committed to helping alleviate poverty. His commitment is to protect corporate greed.

Adjournment Proceedings

The first and only person who has been the Minister of Northern Affairs since his role was created claims to be absolutely committed to 100% of the retail subsidy being passed on directly to northerners. In fact, he said his internal audit will make sure of that. The minister says his internal review will assess nutrition north's performance. I can tell him right now that its performance is terrible. Food insecurity and prices have continued to rise under the program.

The minister should recall that when I called the CEO of the North West Company, Dan McConnell, to appear before the indigenous and northern affairs committee, he refused to disclose that he earned \$3.9 million in one year. The North West Company uses nutrition north. That means we can interpret that Canadian tax dollars are funding corporate greed.

I travelled to 13 Kivalliq and Kitikmeot communities this summer. I heard the same thing everywhere: "We cannot afford the cost of living in Nunavut. We cannot afford groceries. We cannot feed our families." My constituents are yelling for help. I have repeated that in this House so many times. The federal government keeps ignoring us. Nunavummiut do not need another internal study. Nunavummiut need to be able to feed their families.

Ten years ago, the Auditor General exposed that nutrition north was not meeting its objective to increase Inuit's northern food access. The Auditor General said the government "has not done the work necessary to verify that northern retailers are passing on to consumers the full government subsidy". The Auditor General revealed that the government is not requiring retailers to tell it where the tax dollars are going or how high the profits have climbed. What a great deal for a big business.

My question is simple. Will the Minister of Northern Affairs stop delaying and finally tell us the program will be improved so tax dollars are shown going to alleviate poverty and not going into the pockets of rich CEOs?

• (1905)

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, *nakurmiik* to my colleague.

Food security is one of the most pressing issues in the north and one of the top priorities of the minister. The nutrition north program is helping communities address food insecurity, a significant and complex issue requiring shared solutions and partnerships across governments. Until recently, the program's main focus was its retail subsidy, which lowers prices on foods and essential items. Today, after extensive reforms informed by indigenous and northern partners, nutrition north's expanded food security programming takes a holistic food systems approach to strengthening locally led food security and food sovereignty initiatives.

An investment of \$164 million over three years from budget 2021 expanded nutrition north's ability to help eligible northern and isolated communities address local food security priorities. The investment included an additional \$36 million for the harvesters support grant and nearly \$61 million to launch the new community food programs fund under the grants to support community food-sharing activities. An additional \$1.5 million over two years was al-

located for nutrition north's Canada's food security research grant to study the effects of retail subsidy and inform ongoing improvements to the program.

These initiatives make a difference for northerners. Since the launch of the harvesters support grant in 2020, over 15,000 harvesters have been supported with more than 717 new food-sharing initiatives and 410 community hunts and harvests taking place.

I would also like to highlight the community food programs fund, co-developed alongside indigenous partners, including 24 recipient organizations and ITK. This fund directly supports indigenous recipients in culturally appropriate and community-led food security activities, such as school food programs and elder meal programs.

The newly established food security research grant funds indigenous-led research on food access and cost of living in the north to inform ongoing improvements to the retail subsidy program, including subsidy pass-through.

We believe in "by the north, for the north" solutions. To that end, since 2019, nutrition north has transferred over \$76 million for the four regional Inuit organizations through the harvesters support grant and community food programs funding. This includes over \$27.8 million for NTI.

The retail subsidies help save money on essential food like eggs, which cost \$7.99 for 18 in Cape Dorset in February 2024. This represents a 46% savings to consumers. In Igloolik, in the same month, four litres of milk only cost \$5.69 as a result of the subsidy.

Retailers and suppliers have regular independent audits to ensure compliance with program requirements, and we also seek input for ongoing improvements from indigenous and northern partners. For example, recent program adjustments now require retailers to submit monthly price data for all products in the communities. An internal evaluation is also under way, targeted for completion in March 2025, which includes indigenous partners, local communities, elders and knowledge-keepers in the evaluation working group.

Adjournment Proceedings

Nutrition north will not solve food insecurity, but it is part of a long-term strategy to address the factors affecting food security, such as income, employment and access to food distributors. We are committed to continuous improvement of the expanded nutrition north program and to working with indigenous and northern partners to ensure it meets local community needs.

● (1910)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Uqaqtittiji*, Amautiit Nunavut Inuit Women's Association released a report on child poverty in April 2024, and its report showed that those dollars are not working because children are still in poverty.

The close to \$100 million that you mentioned in your response is going to corporate greed. Your government's data on the nutrition north program—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member to speak through the Chair please and not directly to the member.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Uqaqtittiji*, I apologize.

The government's data on the nutrition north program includes prices and the subsidy paid for some products. Since the voices of constituents are not enough, I will cite a researcher. Nicholas Li is one of just two or three researchers who have confidential access to that data. In April, Nicholas told APTN that when he last checked, there was a lag in the data reporting.

Can the Minister of Northern Affairs confirm whether the government is currently even collecting data on the prices and subsidy paid for food products?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the concerns of the member opposite over the nutrition north program subsidies and the reforms to the program. The harvesters support grant and the community food program are part of the expanded nutrition north program and provide significant support for indigenous recipients with culturally appropriate and community-led food security activities.

We remain determined to help reduce food prices through the expanded nutrition north program, which has also helped to increase food security throughout the north. The newly established food security research grant supports indigenous-led academic research into food security and existing federal food programs. Access in the north is informing ongoing improvements to the retail subsidy program.

I look forward to continuing to work with the opposition and our partners to ensure the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of nutrition north. I will pass the member's concerns on to the minister.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:14 p.m.)

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